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Baseball Forever: Reflections on 60 Years in the Game

Ralph Kiner
Triumph Books (March 2004)
Unknown $24.95 (256pp)
978-1-57243-597-1

The author was smart enough to realize early on that a career in sports is short and uncertain. Nevertheless, he happily contradicts that notion as he reminisces in this book about his sixty-five-year association with the national pastime.

Kiner was the premiere slugger of his day. Over his too-brief career (1946?55), he led the National League in home runs seven consecutive seasons; not even the mighty Babe had enjoyed such a streak. Kiner finished with 369 round-trippers and was voted into the Hall of Fame in 1975.

In many ways, he was ahead of his time. When considered opinion within baseball eschewed swimming, golf, and weight lifting because they made their athletes too muscle-bound, Kiner employed these activities in his training regime.

On a more intellectual level, he was involved in the fledgling attempts to build a players? union, fighting for improved working conditions and salaries.

After retiring as a player, Kiner re-learned the game from management's perspective as a minor league general manager and then began his apprenticeship as a sportscaster. To New York Mets fans, however, he has always been one of their own. For seventeen years-from the team's inaugural season in 1962 to 1979 - he shared the broadcast booth with Bob Murphy and Lindsey Nelson, making them the longest-running trio of announcers in pro-sports history. Murphy retired in 2003, leaving Kiner as the only link to the Mets? first year.

Baseball Forever is not a typical sports autobiography. Most of the book consists of a "compare-and-contrast" style as Kiner discusses his life and career in terms of the modern game. He employs the same folksy manner in his narrative as he did in his broadcasting, with concise appraisals and analyses of such topics as the athlete/celebrity connection; the mania over home run records; and "The Future, Then and Now." His chapter on baseball's slow progress towards integration is particularly thoughtful for an "ex-jock." Nor is he shy about expressing his opinion. For example, commenting on the acrimony that has plagued the game recently, Kiner avers,
"Baseball economics is screwed up because the wrong people own most of the teams."

Written in collaboration with Danny Peary, co-author of several excellent works of sports non-fiction, Baseball Forever serves as a reminder that the game consists of more than just the play on the field today, but also the history and lore from generations gone by.

RON KAPLAN (May / June 2004)

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