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Dirty Rice: A Season in the Evangeline League

Gerald Duff
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"Inside the white lines that mark off the [baseball] diamond, a lie cannot live and it cannot prosper," writes Gerald Duff in his compelling and thoughtful novel *Dirty Rice.* Steeped in the history of baseball, this tale proves to be more than a mere sports story. It investigates what happens when one plays a sport out of loving respect for the game versus when one seeks personal gain.

Dirty Rice follows Gemar Batiste, a Native American hired to play in the Evangeline League in 1930s Louisiana. Batiste's pure love for baseball is fulfilled and crushed in a single year of play. From his initial entry onto a team, through training, and on to the playoffs, he views his teammates and Louisiana culture as an outsider. Yet as an outstanding player, he is welcomed everywhere. In this story of a man's character tested by his strongest passion, Batiste must ultimately choose between love of the game and standing firm in the integrity he refuses to sully. Through it all, readers glimpse the heart of a pro player, and are afforded an almost spiritual picture of what it is like to take the mound or swing the bat.

Beautifully written, Duff's novel will clearly appeal to sports fans. Yet those who aren't aficionados will discover a book that delves much deeper, one that may inspire a greater appreciation, even love, for the game of baseball. *Dirty Rice* is a character-driven story in which the drama of human life and of 1930s Louisiana culture become fascinating and entertaining studies on their own. And it will challenge any reader's own ability to stand firm in what they believe when no one else does. The book is a call for integrity, in sports and in life. For, as Duff reiterates, a lie "can stay hid for a good long time, but it has got to show itself in the end."
DIANE GARDNER (March 19, 2012)

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