



God Almighty Hissel: The Life and Legacy of Dick Allen

Mitchell Nathanson

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This significant work clarifies the challenges that black players encountered during the pre-free agent era.

Mitchell Nathanson hits a four-bagger with this richly researched biography of baseball legend Dick Allen that reveals the player's complexities in the context of the racial discrimination of his era, incorporating factors like the club owners' control over the game and its players.

Allen was one of the best and most controversial baseball players of the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, George Myatt, a frustrated Philadelphia Phillies manager, complained that "God Hissel" could not control Allen. Mitchell Nathanson, professor of law at Villanova University and the author of four previous books on baseball, shows that Allen's actions came more from his rebellion against the "plantation mentality" of baseball than from a lack of divine intervention.

Allen played for five teams during his controversial fifteen-year career. He demanded high salaries and received them, becoming, at the time, the highest-paid player in both Phillies and White Sox history. He backed up his demands with impressive statistics—the 1964 National League Rookie of the Year, the 1972 American League MVP, 351 career home runs, and a .292 lifetime batting average.

Robert and Ruly Carpenter, the Phillies owners, were indifferent to their African American players, though, and the fans were worse. After a hellish 1963 season in Jim Crow Arkansas with the Phillies AAA affiliate, Allen suffered racial taunts and had to dodge smoke bombs and bottles hurled at him during games. He, like all "second generation" (those who followed Jackie Robinson) African American players, was also paid less initially and had fewer endorsement opportunities than white players, and he was bound to his team by a reserve clause.

Nathanson concludes his biography by positing that Allen would have been a revered member of the Hall of Fame had he played twenty years later. This significant work clarifies the challenges that black players encountered during the pre-free agent era, and shows how Dick Allen fought the system for his rights as a player and a man.

KARL HELICHER (Summer 2016)

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