



Legends Never Die: Athletes and their Afterlives in Modern America

Richard Ian Kimball

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Against all the laws of nature, certain sports heroes pull off the extraordinary stunt of running faster, jumping higher, hitting a ball farther after they die. In a word, athletes—think George Gipp (the Gipper), Lou Gehrig, Dale Earnhardt—achieve immortality, the same elusive stuff Achilles sought on the battlefields of Troy. How and why the immortalization process happens—media coverage, Hollywood, family activism—is the question this captivating project answers. Richard Ian Kimball spotlights Joe DiMaggio, Bonnie McCarroll, Benny Paret, Mickey Mantle, Ted Williams, and many other notables, all to uncover the mythmaking behind the legend.

John Updike built up Williams's immortality bonafides in a famous essay after the retiring slugger hit a home run in his last at bat and refused to come out of the dugout to tip his cap. "Our \[fan\] noise for some seconds passed beyond excitement into a kind of immense open anguish, a wailing, a cry to be saved. But immortality is nontransferable. The papers said that the other players, and even the umpires on the field, begged him to come out and acknowledge us in some way, but he never had and did not now. Gods do not answer letters."

MATT SUTHERLAND (July/August 2017)

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