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The Sizzler: George Sisler Baseballs Forgotten Great

Rick Huhn
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If there existed a formula by which one could attain lasting fame, it likely would not include integrity, humility, dedication or excellence at ones occupation. In this biography, the author examines the career of the Hall-of-Fame first-baseman and his gradual descent from public consciousness. Sisler displayed an abundance of each of these qualities during his sixteen-year career in the majors, playing alongside such legends as Babe Ruth, Ty Cobb, Honus Wagner and Walter Johnson. Yet, as Huhn makes his case for Sislers rightful place in baseball lore, one finds that it might just be those admirable character traits that keep Sisler a couple of tape-measure shots from immortality.

For the bulk of his career, Sisler toiled for the lowly St. Louis Browns, never reaching the postseason. Despite his impressive list of personal accomplishments on the field, Sisler was overshadowed in his own hometown by a temperamental legend in-the making, St. Louis Cardinal second-baseman Rogers Hornsby.

The degree in mechanical engineering that Sisler earned from the University of Michigan made him an anomaly among his peers when he reached the majors. Also making him somewhat unique was his refusal to drink, smoke, swear, or gamble. A good number of players at the time were doing all four simultaneously. Sislers skills were often favorably compared to Cobb, considered by many to be the best ever to play the game. “But in 1922 all comparisons paled,” writes Huhn. “No longer was Sisler the next Ty Cobb or Hal Chase. Now he was the first George Sisler.” But its the ferocious, risk-taking Cobb that looms in the minds of fans today much as he did then.

Huhn is an Ohio attorney-turned-author and member of the Society for American Baseball Research. Baseball, more than any other sport, finds itself a literary subject due in no small part to the vast amounts of recorded history available. Huhn leans heavily on microfilm from *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* for game recaps, and his painstaking research efforts yield a rich supply of highlights that seemingly could have occurred yesterday rather than eighty years ago.

Huhn includes an excerpt from the August 30 issue of *Outlook*, in which superstar pitcher Christy Mathewson writes, “Now there is Sisler of the St. Louis team-he is every bit as valuable as Babe Ruth, some people think more valuable. But he has another temperament. When he makes a great hit or a great play and the crowd is ready to idolize him, he modestly touches his cap and fades out of sight.” Though Huhns motives are noble and *The Sizzler* is a fine tribute to a player who deserves more recognition, one cant help but think were he alive today, George Sisler might be embarrassed by all the fuss.

SCOTT STOERCK (August 18, 2009)

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