Book Review

Leverett T. (Terry) Smith
North Carolina Wesleyan College, Rocky Mount, NC 27804

LATE INNINGS: A Documentary History of Baseball, 1945-1972

Late Innings is the third in a series of “documentary histories”; the first two--Early Innings (1995) and Middle Innings (1998)--dealt with 1825-1908 and 1900-1948, respectively. Late Innings presents many diverse documents in a highly readable manner. Thus it’s both useful as a reference and enjoyable to read. The game on the field is just one of many focuses.

The documents of Late Innings are arranged in chronological order, but the book is also divided into eight chapters, each with thematic emphases as indicated by their titles. The first, “Baseball in the Post-Landis Era”, deals with the office of the Commissioner, the various dimensions of Jackie Robinson’s arrival in the majors, and the evidence of strained relations between owners and players (though no document represents Robert Murphy and the American Baseball Guild). Three of the 14 documents focus directly on the game on the field.

Chapter 2, “Controversies over Antitrust, Airwaves”, contains documents on these and the earlier themes. In addition, there is an article on Allan Roth, another on the bonus rule, and a third on the move of the Braves to Milwaukee. Five of the 18 documents deal directly with the game on the field.

The next two chapters, “Baseball Moves West” and “Continental Divides”, set the stage for the expansion era, featuring documents about the move west of the Giants and the Dodgers and the formation of the Continental League. These also contain the first two of three reviews of baseball books: Charles Einstein’s The Fireside Book of Baseball (1956) and Harold Seymour’s Baseball: The Early Years (1960). Only seven of 32 documents in these chapters deal directly with the game on the field.

Chapter 5, entitled “Legislating Baseball”, draws together documents on such disparate matters as Congressional investigations, the awarding of expansion franchises, Frick’s ruling on Roger Maris’ bid to break Babe Ruth’s single-season home run record, and the restoration of the powers of the Commissioner. In this chapter, seven of the 16 documents concern the game on the field. As a contrast, the next chapter, “Baseball Confronts Modernity”, appears to have only three of 13. Here the main focus is on documents concerning the executive director position of the Major League Baseball Players Association and the signing of the first Basic Agreement. Nothing, though, documents the hiring of Marvin Miller. It includes a review of Lawrence Ritter’s The Glory of Their Times (1966).

Chapter 7, entitled “The Era of Labor Unrest Begins”, documents the firing of umpires Al Salerno and Bill Valentine, the National Labor relations Board ruling that baseball is subject to its rulings, and the Flood antitrust suit. The last chapter (“Counting Numbers, Dollars, and Rights”) begins with fantasy baseball and a story on the “statistics revolution” and ends with commentary on the Flood decision. Only five of the final 21 documents deal directly with the game on the field.

Late Innings, though, is more than a collection of documents; it’s a documentary history. Sullivan provides a two-tiered narrative structure for the documents he presents. The chapter titles provide the first, and each is followed by a narrative introduction of a page or so. Secondly, each of the documents is preceded by an introductory comment that, on occasion, points toward further recommended reading. There is a bibliographic essay, an index, and 12 pages of photographs.

What sort of baseball history does Sullivan construct? He clearly sees baseball history as institutional history. He is interested primarily in how the game has developed as a business and how the business and rules changes have affected the way the game is played. The focus is on the business, rather than on an account of the game on the field; thus, it contrasts with a book such as Charles C. Alexander’s Breaking the Slump (2002), another very good history, which focuses on the game on the field without ignoring the business. By my count, only 30 of the 114 documents in Sullivan’s book deal directly with the game on the field.

One final note about the three volumes. The dates of the first are 1825-1908, the second 1900-1948, the third 1945-1972. In each case there is a significant time period covered twice. This serves to intertwine the volumes and make them a continuous history. We should expect another volume--titled Extra Innings perhaps? If so, it will be interesting to see what Mr. Sullivan will do for titles after that.