

The New Bill James Baseball Abstract

By Bill James

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By David Cohen

Bill James is a baseball historian, and no pat answer ever satisfies him. James has once again attempted to go back and study the sport's past, evaluating and re-evaluating the game's players and teams in a way that is thorough and fair to players from all different eras and circumstances. The result of his research is the third edition of this book

James' many fans – those who appreciate his iconoclasm and his ability to cut through both the hype of today and the dense fog of history – will obviously be attracted to this book. But, his latest work should also appeal to some of his critics, those who think of him as a nuisance whose various mathematical formulas sap the game of its romantic, emotional aspects – and tarnish those immortals (Rogers Hornsby, Nolan Ryan, Roberto Clemente) whom James doesn't rank as high as they think he should.

This time out, James goes well beyond his formulas to write about so many who played the game. His latest book, among many other things, rates the top 100 major-league players at each position and the top Negro Leaguers as well. By evaluating so many, James is able to give life to so many forgotten and somewhat-forgotten players.

He spices his lists with anecdotes and quotes about virtually all of these players, from Babe Ruth (No. 1 overall) to the 100th best at each position. It's obvious that it means something to James that Bibb Falk and Minnie Minoso and Granny Hamner and Ned Williamson and Newt Allen and so many other fine players be remembered in some manner. Not because they were the best (they weren't) but because it isn't enough to immortalize only those great enough to be branded "immortals."

"The Historical Abstract" isn't a book that demands to be read from cover to cover – one can read it in dribs and drabs, a section or a few players at a time. James has a tendency to go off on tangents and there are a few oddball tirades sprinkled in the book, but this book is a satisfying one – useful in some contexts, fun in almost all.



