

***Reading Baseball: Books, Biographies, and the Business of the Game*, by Braham Dabscheck (Fitness Information Technology, International Center for Performance Excellence, West Virginia University, Morgantown, 2011)**

Thomas Hickie*

For any sports administrator or any student studying a sports-related course and hoping to eventually work in the sports industry, Braham Dabscheck's *Reading Baseball* is a 'must read'. For any sports lawyer or sports law student, the first section on the 'business' is a 'must read'.

Although the 15 essays or chapters of the book (divided into three parts) are based upon 15 pieces of work by Dabscheck previously published in various academic journals, Dabscheck has been able to weave them together to compile a worthy publication for any reader to gain an understanding of the game and, arguably, the United States of America. The downside, if there is one, is that some of the editing (particularly of the chapters in the final two sections) reads or 'feels' somewhat dated as to the time when Dabscheck first wrote the review or article.

The highlight of the book is the first section comprised of four chapters concerning the 'business'. For Australian sports administrators as well as some in the media focused on salary caps and drafts as the way to ensure a viable sporting competition, perhaps a reflection on Dabscheck's alternative argument on revenue-sharing may provide food for thought. Similarly, a read of Dabscheck would be worthwhile as UEFA grapples with the introduction of its 'financial fair play' rules (which have already been criticised in some quarters for unfairly targeting players and arguably will, in any event, maintain the status quo as bottom placed clubs will remain condemned to the lower rungs).

Perhaps the greatest contribution Dabscheck has made to sporting industrial relations, whatever one's personal views might be on player wage restrictions and movements, is his easy reading style. Dabscheck is a master. In his review of Stephen Jay Gould's *Triumph and Tragedy in Mudville: A lifelong Passion for Baseball* (Jonathan Cape, London, 2004), Dabscheck explains that Gould (1944–2002), a paleontologist from Harvard University whose wide range of interests included baseball, 'had a remarkable skill of being able to explain and

* Dr Thomas Hickie is a member of the Bars of NSW and England and Wales (Gray's Inn) as well as a former Judge of the High Court of Fiji. He teaches Sports Law courses at the University of New South Wales.

discuss issues, usually the province of arcane specialists, in a readily accessible and interesting way for non-experts'. Could this not also be a description of Dabscheck, whose articles I have found over the years to be a 'must read'. As well, at any conference I have attended where he is speaking, his paper has always been a thought-provoking event with his clear presentation style. This publication reinforces my view.

One of the joys of the book is also the straight talking quotes both from Dabscheck as well as those he cites from other sources. Some examples from Dabscheck on labour market controls: 'In attempting to understand the behaviour of sporting leagues, the first and last thing we need to know is that they are cartels'; 'economists have traditionally argued that revenue sharing, rather than labour market controls, is the best way to attain sporting equality'; 'An alternative solution to differences in the financial strength of clubs is to tackle "the problem at its source" and regulate the product market by redistributing income from rich to poor clubs.' Of the famous team manager, Branch Rickey, Dabscheck notes that although he was lauded for employing Jackie Robinson in 1947 as the first African-American to play Major League Baseball thereby ending the colour barrier which then existed, he was also hypocritical about player rights generally: 'it is difficult to escape the conclusion that Rickey's statements concerning "capitalist individualism", "traditional American liberty", his condemnation of "government of men by executive order" and his abhorrence of "dictatorships" was contradicted by his support for and use of the reserve system and his development of the farm system. They were the ultimate sources of his authority and his ability to derive a high income from baseball. His rights were players' wrongs ... Rickey appears to be nothing more than self-serving, if not hypocritical.' Dabscheck can also deliver the ultimate one liner as he does in his critical book review of the publication *Baseball and Philosophy: Thinking Outside of the Batters' Box* (Open Court, Chicago, 2004) when he concludes: 'Descartes was thrown out at first on a grounder.'

Some examples of quotes Dabscheck has cited from other sources are alone worth the purchase of the book: 'I am pleased that God made my skin black, but I wish he had made it thicker' (from Curt Flood's autobiography); 'I came to feel that if I, as a Jew, hit a home run I was hitting against Hitler' (from Hank Greenberg in the film *Baseball* by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick, Florentine Films, 1994); when a reform Rabbi produced a formula of words that Greenberg could interpret as allowing him to play in 1934 on Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year) Aviva Kempner in her documentary film, *The life and Times of Hank Greenberg* (A Cowboy Booking International Release, Ciesla Production, 1999) shows a newspaper clipping with the headline: 'Talmud Clears Greenberg for Holiday Play'; and finally on baseball and America itself: 'It may be that the most American thing about baseball is that it, as we the fan take it, is a refuge from America. I think that when we go to baseball we are going away from the America of our daily lives' (from Donald Hall in the film *Baseball*).

Yes, Dabscheck could have devoted a chapter to the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League rather than noting its existence in one line in his review of Ken Burns' film *Baseball*. Yes, he could have written more concerning 'the nature of belief systems for fans who support a perennial losing team' rather than one line in his discussion of baseball and philosophy and contrasted how this supports or detracts from his discussion on sporting cartels and their apparent need to maximise the uncertainty of the results as 'uncertainty excites spectators ... predictability turns them away.' And, yes, he could have updated his later chapters.

On the plus side, however, and it is a very big plus, this book is a pleasure to read and leaves one calling for more. Hopefully, Dabscheck will now turn his attention to the sporting cartels in Australia – the good (if one can assert such a thing), the bad and the ugly.

THE AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND SPORTS LAW JOURNAL

Volume 6

2011

Number 1

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