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Book Review: *Major League Bride*

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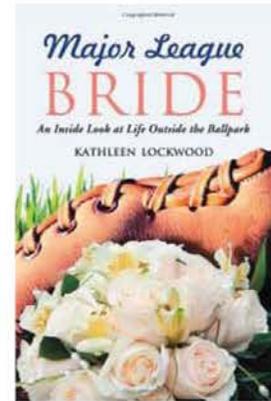
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major league bride

**Reviewed by Scott D. Peterson, University of
Maine**

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As the title indicates, Lockwood's memoir sets out to relate the big league experience from the uncommon perspective of a baseball player's wife. Fans of a certain age might recognize her husband, Skip Lockwood, a starter turned closer who achieved some fame with the New York Mets in the mid-1970s—and who shared a 1965 rookie card with Blue Moon Odom and Catfish Hunter. More than just a memoir, Lockwood's book provides a cultural history because her and her husband's time in baseball was bracketed by the strikes of 1972 and 1981—an important period in the labor relations of Major League Baseball. In addition to telling a unique and important story, Lockwood's style and themes bring a big league pedigree to the plate that echoes and updates the cultural work of baseball found in the writing of Albert Goodwill Spalding, Horatio Alger, John J. McGraw.



In a body of literature that is predominately voiced in the masculine perspective, Lockwood's book takes its place alongside the work of Jean Hastings Ardell (*Breaking into Baseball*), Barbara Gregorich (*Women at Play*), and Susan Fornoff (*Lady in the Locker Room*). While women as fans, historians, and sportswriters can get close to the game through their devotion to the sport and their work, Lockwood's book shows that a baseball wife perhaps lives within the game to a greater degree than anyone short of the player him- or herself. (The mother of a player can also get pretty close to the game, as attested in Jennifer Ring's *Stolen Bases: Why American Girls Don't Play Baseball*). While Bobbie Bouton and Jessica Canseco have written books from the perspective of a player's wife, Lockwood's book offers a more balanced take on the experience in that she doesn't have cleats to grind about infidelity and steroid use. A Google search reveals at least three ongoing blogs devoted to the same subject, which perhaps indicates that more such narratives are in the offing; we can only hope that future authors of baseball wife memoirs will address their topic with half as much insight and care as Lockwood clearly took with

her book.

In addition to providing a cultural snapshot of the 1970s that brings back fond memories of polyester sport coats, shag carpeting, and fuzzy wallpaper, *Major League Bride* will also appeal to readers looking for interesting stories about players as widely disparate as Satchel Paige (who was Skip Lockwood's teammate for one game in 1965 thanks to a promotional effort by Charlie Finley), Bill "Spaceman" Lee (who co-owned a Volkswagon Beetle with the Lockwoods during a stretch of winter ball in Puerto Rico), and Felipe Alou (who managed Skip in Denver during his last stop with the AAA affiliate of the Montreal Expos in 1982). In between these points, Lockwood's book will keep the reader amazed at the number of well-known players, managers, and owners that she encountered during her involvement with the game, which also goes to show how tightly knit the baseball fraternity was in the 1970s. That point is further illustrated—along with interesting insight to the period in which major league players fought for and won the right to free agency—when Lockwood recalls how their condo was turned into a temporary rooming house for other players and their wives during the strike of 1972. Today's fans will also be surprised by the minimum salaries of the period and the fact the players' wives organized potluck dinners and carpooled to save money.

Perhaps most impressive are the ways in which Lockwood's book fits into the larger picture of baseball literature in general. The book combines an alliterative style that would have made Albert G. Spalding proud with chapter and subsection titles that are both thematic and reminiscent of the music of the 1970s. Because her book tells the story of her development and maturity as a young woman who went straight from college into the world of baseball, it taps into the Bidungsroman/Horatio Alger narrative qualities of the game's literature that date back to the late nineteenth century. What's more, Lockwood's take on the role of the baseball wife would have earned the approval of John McGraw—even if she and Skip didn't wait until after the World Series to get married, as McGraw advised in his book, *My 30 Years in Baseball* (Since Skip was playing for the Milwaukee Brewers—a team that was a carry-over of the historically bad Seattle Pilots—the Lockwoods would still be waiting to hold the ceremony.) While corned beef was not in Lockwood's culinary repertoire, as was the case with the exemplary baseball wife McGraw held up in his book, her memoir makes it clear that she learned to be enough of an amateur psychologist and motivational specialist to smooth over the days when Skip's work on the field didn't go well without the hours and hours of food preparation.

The foregoing should make it clear that Lockwood's book will appeal to a wide range of readers: women—and men—who are interested in hearing the story of one woman's experience in baseball, researchers seeking insight to the tumultuous world of baseball during the 1970s, and scholars wanting to examine a unique take on baseball literature will all find something to like about *Major League Bride*. Each of those readers will also appreciate Lockwood's honest, open, and genuine approach to her story of playing Wendy among the Lost Boys of summer as they all chased the American dream interpreted through the lens of baseball.

Major League Bride, Kathleen Lockwood. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2010, paper, 221 pages, \$29.95.

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