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Book Review: *Breaking Into Baseball*

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Breaking Into Baseball

Reviewed by Scott D. Peterson, Department of English, University of Maine

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Ardell's book might very well be subtitled "The Seven Faces of Eve" as she argues for goddess worship theories for baseball's origins and then organizes the rest of the chapters around the seven ways in which women can interact with the game of baseball: as fans (both in and out of the stands), as players (both amateur and professional), as umpires, owners, and members of the media. Baseball's gender barrier (a first cousin to the game's now obsolete color barrier) provides a consistent and compelling undertone to the book as so many of the women that Ardell writes about (perhaps herself included) seek to interact with the game on a deeper level than they are allowed to by their friends, relatives, and society in general. As such, this book will appeal especially to female fans of the game, as well as to baseball historians of either sex.

Two of the book's real strengths are its encyclopedic qualities and the depth of its scholarly apparatus. It is a veritable who's who of women who have been associated with baseball from its earliest days. From Maude the pet blonde (a fan of the 1969 Cincinnati Red Legs to left-handed minor league pitcher Ila Borders (who wrote the book's forward), they're all here: bell-ringing fan Hilda Chester, barnstormer Lizzie Murphy, team owner Marge Schott, and umpire Pam Postema. Each chapter is extensively footnoted, taking the curious reader even deeper into the story or sending the researcher off for firsthand material. For example, even some of baseball's most serious students might not be aware of the world tour undertaken by Philadelphia Bobbies, a team of fourteen women (with a male battery) that played games in the Northwest and Japan in 1925. Their story is in this book, along with countless others.

The book's extensive breadth might also serve as its only weakness. A reader in search of an in-depth treatment of the All American Girls Baseball League might want to look elsewhere since the most sustained and far-reaching example of professional baseball for women is treated in a mere seven pages (one for every year of the league's existence). Balancing this, of course, is the fact the reader learns about women in the Negro Leagues (both as owners and players) and the efforts of a few ardent (almost evangelical) believers who have been working to establish

amateur leagues for women baseball players over the last several decades. Clearly, as a general survey, this book is successful on several levels.

As the reader looks back down the myriad pathways women have taken--and continue to take--in order to interact with a game they love in the face of all manner of adversity, he or she will no doubt be struck by the sheer weight of the historical and anecdotal evidence. Women have been a part of baseball for a long time despite the fact that a female has never played for a major league team. There are those who doubt whether that particular Grail Quest will ever come to fruition. Ila Borders came as close as any woman and Ardell's book sufficiently chronicles her achievements and what they cost her as a player and a person. As such, there is still at least one more chapter to be written.

Jean Hastings Ardell. *Breaking into Baseball: Women and the National Pastime*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005. 274 pp. Paper, \$19.95, ISBN 0-8093-2627-2.

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