

NEIGHBORHOODS

Unique and historic baseball moments discussed by local authors

BY CHARLES STERNAIMOLO
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Last Saturday afternoon's visitors to The Rabbit Hole Bookstore were given a brief reprieve from the chilly temperatures and compacted ice and snow covering the landscape outside with the offer of hot coffee, homemade brownies, and the stories and anecdotes from a couple of knowledgeable local authors promoting their new books, which discuss fun and unique aspects of baseball history.

Even though speculation over who will win Super Bowl XLIII is currently dominating sports news, and baseball's '09 season will not officially begin until early April, The Rabbit Hole's owners decided to fill the baseball void and schedule Fitchburg's Ralph Pallotta, Lunenburg's Richard Letarte, and Townsend's Jack Walsh to discuss and sign copies of their new books which feature interesting trivia and humor on the sport more than it's one hundred year history.

Ralph Pallotta, whose penname is "RIP" Pallotta, presented his second publication, "One Day in Mudville." Pallotta, who is also remembered by many area residents as a radio sports topic broadcaster and now works at a local branch of Sovereign Bank, said his book focuses on the mid twentieth century era of baseball, which he added, is his favorite. Pallotta's first publication, which he bound himself in 1986, is about Minor League Baseball's Nashua Pirates, and is in Cooperstown's Baseball Hall of Fame Library.

Letarte, who graduated from Fitchburg's Notre Dame Prep School, presented "That One Glorious Season." Also focusing on the 50s and 60s, the time immediately prior to expansion, this is Letarte's first book.

"I want to be known as the Harper Lee of baseball books," he said seriously but with a smile. Lee authored only one book - the Pulitzer Prize-winning American favorite, "To Kill A Mockingbird." Letarte, a certified public accountant, funded his book with his own money and spent many hours researching through local libraries and conducting personal interviews both in person on the telephone, with help from his wife, Mary Ellen.

The store was filled with both long-time fans of baseball, as well as regular bookstore patrons who just happened to stumble onto the event by chance. Teenagers and adults alike were all ears as the authors shared anecdotes and player stories from their books and baseball-related childhood memories.

As part of their research, both authors spent countless hours contacting retired baseball players, who, they said, were often conveniently listed in the phone book. According to both Pallotta and Letarte, the former players were always excited to discuss their baseball past and made themselves readily available. Letarte's wife, who was also in attendance, added that Letarte's favorite player, Dusty Rhodes, told Letarte he was the only author who got his story "just right."

When asked by an audience member where the title "One Day In Mudville," came from, Pallotta explained that 'Mudville' is a fictionalized town name from the opening line of the famous 1888 poem titled "Casey At Bat," by Worcester's own Ernest Thayer.

The poems begins with the line, "The outlook wasn't brilliant for the Mudville 9 that day..."

The term eventually came to stand for anywhere baseball was played. Pallotta's book is about "several games where history happens."

"It's about players who may have had a great season - but are not on the walls at Cooperstown," said Pallotta.

In the introduction of his book Pallotta writes about how baseball was different in the 60s because it was fun and it was about the game itself, and not what happens off of the field.

"There's a chapter about a guy who ran around the bases backwards, a chapter about a 59-year-old major league player named Satchel Paige, another chapter about a 33-inning game," said Pallotta.

Both books are available at The Rabbit Hole Bookstore, located at 805 Main St. For upcoming events check out their website at www.therabbitholeusa.com or call (978) 345-0040.



Authors Richard Letarte (left) and RIP Pallotta (right) were at the Rabbit Hole Bookstore last weekend to talk baseball and sign copies of their books. Pallotta (photo bottom) reads an excerpt from his book, "One day in Mudville."

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