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Review of *Bring in the Right-Hander! My Twenty-Two Years in the Major Leagues* by Jerry Reuss

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Reuss, Jerry. *Bring in the Right-Hander! My Twenty-Two Years in the Major Leagues*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014. Pp. v+250. Photos. \$27.95 hb.

Jerry Reuss wrote this book to share his baseball stories—stories of obstacle, triumph, naïvety at times, clubhouse antics, and admiration for the game as well as teammates and coaches. Reuss is one of the few to play in four decades, even though he barely achieved that feat. As a gifted left-handed twenty-year-old called up in September 1969, he made his major-league pitching debut on the twenty-seventh, winning his first game and contributing with a run-batted-in. As a forty-one-year-old, he ended his career as a September call-up in 1990, after being released by several teams, pitching in the minor leagues, and virtually begging his way for one last chance—an entire year of determination just so he could end a notable career on his terms.

A St. Louis native who was drafted and first pitched for the Cardinals—who later was abruptly traded for growing a mustache the owner did not approve of—Reuss went on to pitch for eight teams in both leagues. However, of the 250 pages of text, 123 are devoted

to the eight years he spent as a Los Angeles Dodger. In many respects, this book is another addition to the lengthy number of works on Dodger lore, justifiable for Reuss since those were the highlight years of his career. When his pitching career nose-dived in Pittsburgh, the Dodgers in 1979 gave him another chance. With renewed interest, he reinvigorated his off-season workouts and dedication. As a Dodger, Reuss pitched his only no-hitter, was named Come Back Player of the Year, earned his second All-Star berth and starting assignment, was Cy Young Award runner-up, and helped win a World Series championship. His respect for the Dodger organization and manager Tommy Lasorda is clearly expressed.

For Reuss, humor became a coping mechanism as a player. “Some players find solace in their religious faith. Other players hope to find it in the bottom of a glass. For me, in times of great stress, I find clarity and comfort in my humor” (146). For an insider view of locker room humor, Reuss at times excels. There were some entertaining tales—for example, he caused considerable angst when he showed up at the Yankees locker room prior to a game telling them he had just been traded to the New York club when he hadn’t. A few of the yarns, however, would have been best left untold. There is a fine line between antagonizing and humor, and Reuss straddled it as a player. At times, Reuss earned a reputation as a difficult player from management’s perspective. He notes that his former manager Leo Durocher referred to Reuss in his autobiography as the “asshole of all time” (65). Reuss recounts how he and Durocher later made amends through the intercession of Lasorda. With all of his questionable antics, he admits poor judgment or immaturity and incorporates how he later apologized or corrected the injustice.

Bring in the Right-Hander! is meant to entertain baseball followers—the title coming from what he heard on the mound when being removed from a game. The book is limited to his professional career—a mere seven pages chronicles his youth before transitioning to a tryout in high school just before being drafted. An even briefer Epilogue discusses his postplaying days. The Hollywood exposure and trappings enjoyed after winning the World Series in Los Angeles were the only significant discussions of his life outside the baseball diamond.

The book is a season-by-season chronicle based on his recollections, with newspaper accounts of the day and other materials as aids. His yearly records are part of his account, but he does not include a career overview or summary other than his longevity, which short-changes his notable accomplishments. While the book is entertaining, sports historians will be left wanting for analysis; missing is the opportunity to address the changing nature of America’s pastime. His career bridged significant milestones in baseball history: player strikes; free agency and the reserve clause; specialization of the relief pitcher; introduction of the designated hitter; concern about pitch counts and the decrease of complete games; tinkering with the strike zone; and league expansion, to name a few. Most of these developments receive scant commentary or are not addressed. His insights on other players also are often shallow. But the book is meant for fans—and they will enjoy it—exemplified by his invitation at the end to visit his Flickr site where he has posted hundreds of photos from his playing days.

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