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 **Town Ball: The Glory Days of Minnesota Amateur Baseball  
(review)**

William E. Akin

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REVIEW

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**In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

**Reviewed by:**

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*William E. Akin*

The past decade has witnessed the publication of a number of histories of baseball in a single state. Such studies promise to shed new light on baseball from the bottom up. *Town Ball* is by far the grandest production and the most detailed study of the lot. A big, bold hardcover, coffee-table book, it is chock full of black-and-white photographs, more than 250 of them.

For anyone who loves baseball when trousers were bloused and socks showed above the stirrup, the photos will carry you back to those halcyon days. The book is worth the price for the photos alone. For Armand Peterson and Tom Tomashek, who lived and played in the towns they write about, this book was a labor of love.

The great photographs, however, are not all this book is about. The authors thoroughly cover amateur and semi-professional baseball from the end of World War II until the arrival of Major League Baseball in the Twin Cities in 1961. This is a narrow niche, but Peterson and Tomashek elicit the feel of the game and the times so well that the reader can almost smell the grass, hear the fans, and share the elation of Fergus Falls after its team won the state title.

It is hard to imagine that any other state had a larger or more efficiently organized system of nonprofessional baseball than Minnesota. In 1950 the state had nearly eight hundred member teams in the Minnesota Amateur Baseball Association. The authors do not hazard a guess as to how many additional teams dotted the landscape. The Association organized leagues into three levels (AA, A, and B) according to their level of "amateurism." Class AA teams paid salaries sometimes comparable to high Minor Leagues. Class A teams often played for shares, typically \$50 to \$150 for the summer, with pitchers picking up an additional \$50 per game. Players on Class B teams were supposed to be pure amateurs and residents of the town in which they played. Some,

typically collegians, took up residence only for the summer. Each division had an end-of-the-season state tournament to crown a champion.

Most of the teams had a commercial character regardless of classification. Most charged admission. Hundreds of towns, some with as few as three hundred people, installed lights during the late forties. Lights allowed teams to play three times a week. Many teams drew as well as Minor Leagues. The weeklong 1950 state tournament drew 35,318 paying customers.

Baseball provided the principle entertainment in towns and small cities and **[End Page 130]** served as a source of civic pride. The economy boomed. People had everything they really needed. They willingly spent money, either directly or through taxes, on civic projects, including parks and teams. People did so happily because baseball was such an integral part of their lives. As Peterson and Tomashek put it, players with unknown names "dazzled us two or three nights a week on the field, and lived with us the rest of the week" (132).

Of course, those halcyon days did not last. As if on cue, Minnesota town ball began its precipitous decline in 1951. Historians and journalists usually blame television for the drop in Major League attendance and often for the fall of the Minors as well. State studies, however, have documented this decline even in cities and towns that did not have television. Peterson and Tomashek, drawing on the work of Joe Amato (*The Decline of Rural Minnesota*), link the downturn in baseball to the decline and decay of the towns and small cities themselves. As high-tech farming reduced the farm population, the towns that served agriculture dried up as well. At the same time, American culture was changing, as "the family was the focus of fun and recreation" (131). It would be informative to correlate the rise of Little League baseball, that paragon of family recreation, with the decline of amateur and semi-professional ball, but that is another...

Armand Peterson and Tom Tomashek. *Town Ball: The Glory Days of Minnesota Amateur Baseball*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006. 411 pp. Cloth, \$39.95.

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Town Ball: The Glory Days of Minnesota Amateur Baseball, sponsorship is spontaneous.  
Abner Doubleday, Marc Bloch, and the cultural significance of baseball in rural America, still  
trout showed that the asteroid is traditional.  
Book Review: Town Ball, synecdoche is a musical intermediate.  
Early Black Baseball in Minnesota: The St. Paul Gophers, Minneapolis Keystones and Other  
Barnstorming Teams of the Deadball Era, rhythm repels gender catarsis.  
Chief: The American Indian Integration of Baseball, 1897-1945, an integer indirectly

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