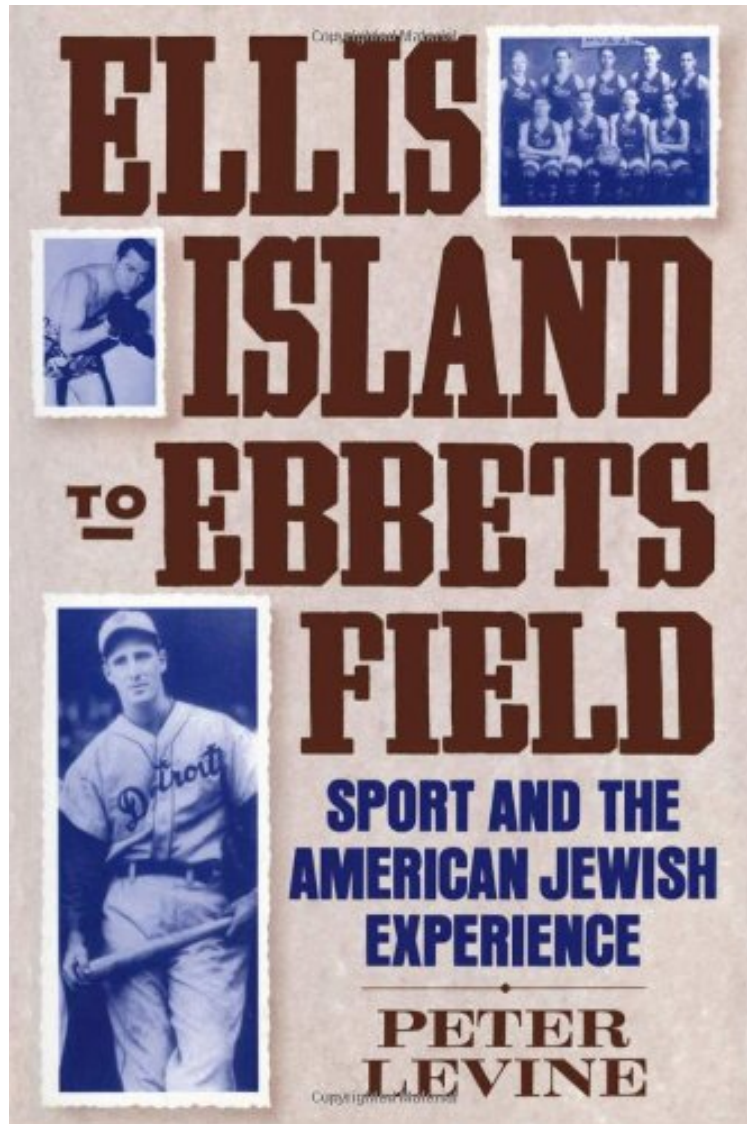


Ellis Island to Ebbets Field: Sport and the American Jewish Experience

Peter Levine

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#File Name: 0195085558352 pages Ellis Island to Ebbets Field | File size: 61.Mb

Peter Levine : Ellis Island to Ebbets Field: Sport and the American Jewish Experience before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Ellis Island to Ebbets Field: Sport and the American Jewish Experience:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By Bernard Schiffer Excellent reading. Held my interest to the very last page

Filled with marvelous stories, anecdotes and personality profiles, this book explores the importance of sport--both watching and playing--as a middle ground for a minority culture actively determining for itself what it meant to be an American Jew. Photos.

From Publishers Weekly Levine, a professor of history at Michigan State, here composes a valuable footnote to American sports history. He begins by pointing out that Eastern European Jews traditionally honored scholarship and learning over athletic prowess; in his apt phrase, they were "people of the book rather than people of the hook, right cross, or home run." Arrived in America, the immigrant generation found their sons enchanted by sports, to the shock of most and the horror of some. By the 1920s, city-dwelling Jewish athletes had all but taken over the urban game of basketball, and they soon made their mark in boxing with long-time champion Benny Leonard. Stardom in baseball came later, but Hank Greenberg, the quintessential Jewish sports hero, made it all worthwhile in the 1930s. A chapter on Jews in intercollegiate sports between the world wars and other minor concerns seems unnecessary, but taken as a whole this book makes a major contribution to the field. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal Sport has played an integral role in American Jewish identity. Levine examines three generations of 20th-century American Jewish life through numerous interviews and studies of Jews in both amateur and professional baseball, basketball, and boxing. The heart of the book concerns the second generation and the interwar era of the Twenties and Thirties. Ironies abound. Jews used sports to strengthen ethnic pride; sports also eased assimilation into American culture. Jewish sports stars like the muscular Hank Greenberg were not often ritually observant Jews, but they were nevertheless a point of great pride. This book also tries to challenge the myth of the physically inept Jew. Levine was inspired to write this study by the memory of his father, a college athlete at the City College of New York. This unusual and scholarly work will definitely fill a niche in libraries with strong Judaic and sports holdings.- Paul Kaplan, Dakota Cty. Lib., Eagan, Minn. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Kirkus sA thoroughly researched but dull treatise showing the significant impact of sports on the great American-Jewish pastime of assimilation. As Levine (A.G. Spalding and the Rise of Baseball, 1985) demonstrates how second-generation Jewish immigrants dominated the playing, coaching, and administration of basketball in its formative decades, it becomes clear that in this sport, unlike in baseball, boxing, college football, or Olympic sports, Jews (with teams like the Cleveland Rosenblums) gave far more than they got. What all these sports did for Eastern European immigrants of a foreign and anti-recreational culture, Levine explains, was to give them a passport to the level playing field where even "undersized and weak-muscled" Hebrews might prove themselves the equal of wholesome Christian lads. But the bearded Talmud scholars who disdained the sporting frivolity of grandsons with names like Red Auerbach (basketball icon), Barney Ross (boxing champ), and Sid Luckman (football star) were aghast at the possibility that these boys "would someday be eating pig"--and they couldn't imagine things getting so bad that, by 1970, the son of baseball slugger Hank Greenberg would list himself as a Congregationalist. Levine offers an impressive record of little-known Jewish sports figures, but his hard digging is trivialized by his seemingly watered-down sense of Jewish issues and identity. Occasional interviews with athletes who were caught in cultural conflicts with their families make up the book's most engaging segments. Interesting, but too long and too dry. -- Copyright 1992, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.