



# **Tales from the Deadball Era: Ty Cobb, Home Run Baker, Shoeless Joe Jackson, and the Wildest Times in Baseball History**

*Mark S. Halfon*

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2014 SLA Baseball Caucus Readers' Choice Award winner from the Special Libraries Association

The Deadball Era (1901–1920) is a baseball fan's dream. Hope and despair, innocence and cynicism, and levity and hostility blended then to create an air of excitement, anticipation, and concern for all who entered the confines of a major league ballpark. Cheating for the sake of victory earned respect, corrupt ballplayers fixed games with impunity, and violence plagued the sport. Spectators stormed the field to attack players and umpires, ballplayers charged the stands to pummel hecklers, and physical battles between opposing clubs occurred regularly in a phenomenon known as "rowdyism."

At the same time, endearing practices infused baseball with lightheartedness, kindness, and laughter. Fans ran onto the field with baskets of flowers, loving cups, diamond jewelry, gold watches, and cash for their favorite players in the middle of games. Ballplayers volunteered for "benefit contests" to aid fellow big leaguers and the country in times of need. "Joke games" reduced sport to pure theater as outfielders intentionally dropped fly balls, infielders happily booted easy grounders, hurlers tossed soft pitches over the middle of the plate, and umpires ignored the rules. Winning meant nothing, amusement meant everything, and league officials looked the other way.

Mark Halfon looks at life in the major leagues in the early 1900s, the careers of John McGraw, Ty Cobb, and Walter Johnson, and the events that brought about the end of the Deadball Era. He highlights the strategies, underhanded tactics, and bitter battles that defined this storied time in baseball history, while providing detailed insights into the players and teams involved in bringing to a conclusion this remarkable period in baseball history.

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