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Sports Coffee Table Books for Christmas

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
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It is Christmas time and this year I want to recommend four major photo and essay collections on sport that have been published in the last two years, each of which would make a very special Christmas gift. Prices range from \$25 to \$75 varying by book and place of purchase.

This is the 75th Anniversary of the National Football League and for the occasion NFL Films and Turner Enterprises produced a documentary for television and a very high quality book.

75 Seasons: The Complete Story of the National Football League, 1920-1995 from Turner Publishing Inc. is a multi-author book divided into decades. The narrative is adequate but what really sets this collection apart is the quality of the photographs, both color and black and white, as well as a number of sketches featured in the volume. This is a wonderful gift for any NFL fan or anyone interested in photography as an art.

Second on the list is Baseball's Golden Age: The Photographs of Charles M. Conlon edited by Neal and Constance McCabe and published by The Sporting News. This one is photography as art and features the Black and White Photos of baseball's greats from 1905 through 1942, the period in which Charles Conlon was supplying photos to New York newspapers and the leading national baseball publications of his time. This photo collection, put together by the McCabe's, has a striking power that pays ample credit to Charles Conlon's artistry. It would be a welcome addition by any baseball fan or student of photography.

Third, and certainly the talk of this aborted baseball season, is the companion book to the Ken Burns's Baseball Documentary that graced the PBS Schedule this fall for 19 1/2 hours. Baseball: An Illustrated History by Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns is published by Knopf and despite its lofty \$60 price tag is still a decent buy at \$35 in many discount and bookstores.

The book is divided into nine innings, as was the documentary, and includes all the photographs used in the TV series and more. In addition there is the accompanying narrative, along with a number of essays from the commentators in the series. Included in these are particularly fine essays by Daniel Okrent and Doris Kearns Goodwin. Even if you own the entire 19 1/2 hours of videotape, this excellent volume still offers more than is found in the documentary footage. It too would be a welcome addition to any sports library.

But when all is said and done, one book stands above all the rest. It is *Baseball: A Treasury of Art and Literature* edited by Michael Roscoe and published by Hugh Lauter Levin Associates, Inc. and distributed by MacMillan. Carrying the highest price tag at \$75 it is nonetheless the best buy of all.

This book's 131 color plates and 100 black-and-white reproductions of objects of art, paintings, and photographs will prove a revelation to those who have never associated the words "baseball" and "art." Accompanying this body of art are ninety pieces of literature including poems, essays, letters, excerpts from novels, and pieces of humor. It too is organized into nine innings.

In the literary area the old standards such as "Casey At the Bat," along with contemporary writers like Kinsella, Roth, and William Kennedy are featured, along with Lou Gehrig's "Farewell Speech" and the observations of Cool Papa Bell, Hank Greenberg, and Ty Cobb. George Carlin's insightful and hilarious "Baseball and Football" is a major highlight.

The art is even more impressive than the literature. Beginning with "Boy With Ball and Bat" by an unidentified artist of 1844, the quality retains a magnificently high standard throughout the innings. From the 19th century many of the major American artists are represented including Eakins, Hunt, Currier and Ives. The most interesting of the paintings reproduced come from the decades of the Thirties and Forties and range from the popular work of Norman Rockwell to the more impressionistic and darker pieces by Clyde Singer and Edward Laning. Among the more recent works many are striking, but none moreso than Andy Warhol's "Baseball" from 1962.

This is a book to be savored. For anyone who loves the game of baseball there could be no better Christmas gift, nor better investment. It will bring hours and hours of pleasure and wonder, reveal the artistry of sport, and raise the old question, "What is it about baseball beyond other sports that attracts so many writers and artists?" And it may begin to provide an answer.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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