

The Reading Corner

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"The All-Lover All-Star Team: And 50 Other Improbable Baseball All-Star Lineups."

By Al Davis and Elliot Horne. William Morrow and Co. 185 pp. \$12.95.

Just what baseball needs – another book of lists.

It is no coincidence that as the nation becomes ever more illiterate, lists have displaced prose as the filler of choice between covers, hard or paper. Guys who have trouble pairing verbs with nouns nevertheless fancy themselves published authors if they can count from 1 to 10.

Is that a cruel assessment? Insensitive? Well, surely no more insensitive than some of the material in *"The All-Lover All-Star Team."*

There are 51 lists in the book, some without notes, some with, and some that would have been better off without. I'd list them all here, but that would be hypocritical.

Most of the lists may be broken into variations on these basic themes:

- Performance (High season average, RBI totals, etc.)
- Ethnic (just two: Jewish and Native American)
- Cross-sports (football, basketball)
- Names
- Personalities

If the approach strikes you as original, you ought to get out more. Like others before them, the authors move some players out of their normal positions, say from outfield to second base, to form a lineup, then justify their paper fantasy by swearing the guy once played three games at second in the minors, or reached second base once on a double, or once saw a second baseman getting into a cab.

Nothing special about the performance and cross-sports lists: they're the kinds of lists fans can create on their own curled up with a couple of reference books on a rainy afternoon.

The ethnic and name lists ("Funny Names," "Names that end in ski," etc.) are old hat. Hard to believe anyone still would find ethnic variations in surnames the cause for laughter.

The book's big failure is in its listing of players on the basis of personality traits. There is nothing new about listing "flakes" and recounting anecdotes of on-field gaffes. But an "Alcoholic All-Star Team"? A "Drug Abuser All-Star Team"? A "Lover All-Star Team"?

Messrs. Davis and Horne use their undocumented expertise to diagnose alcoholism among players current and past, never showing how they distinguish between a reputation for partying and a genuine illness.

They make light of drug abuse by listing the players on their team in Greek letters and suggesting this is how the names might look "to somebody who forgot to just say no." No notes are provided for this list, leaving one to wonder why some folks made it and Bob Welch, a premier pitcher whose career was disrupted and ultimately terminated by drug abuse, didn't.

They make the obvious confusion between love and sex in their selection of the Lover All-Star team, and then just give general innuendo on a few of the selections.

In all, this is a thinly researched book exploiting scandal and sensationalism while adding little to the sporting public's general knowledge. The authors' sports knowledge is suspect (Davis refers to Mets outfielder Darryl Strawberry as the "self-styled 'Straw that stirs the drink"; sorry, but that was Reggie Jackson with the Yankees, and it was Sports Illustrated that called Strawberry the straw that stirs the Mets, not the drink), and Davis' writing style is soggy.