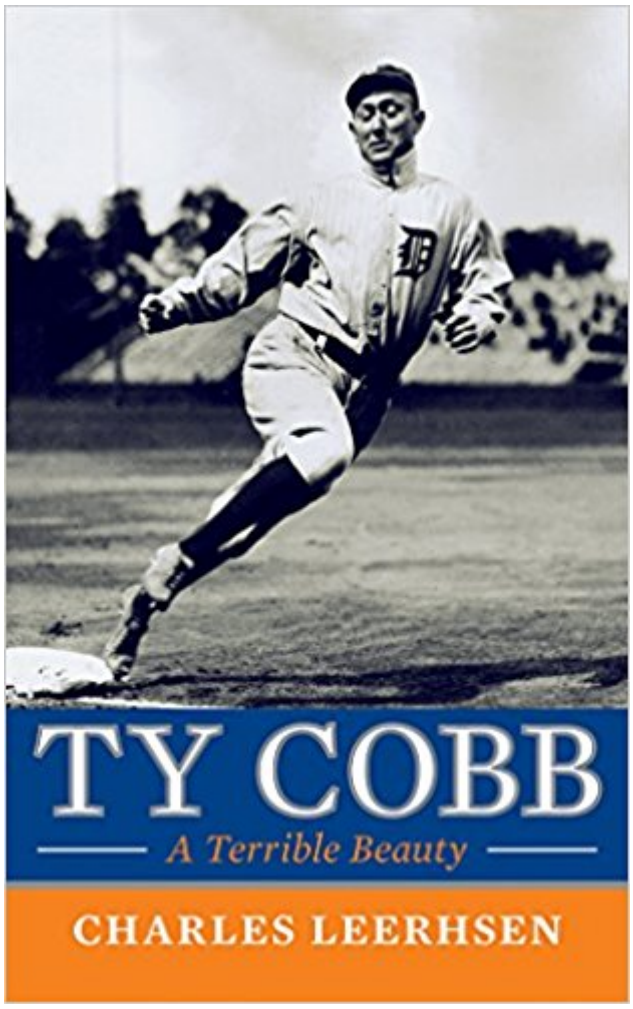
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# Ty Cobb: A Terrible Beauty




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## Synopsis

FinallyÃ¢â ¬â •a fascinating and authoritative biography of perhaps the most controversial player in baseball history, Ty Cobb.Ty Cobb is baseball royalty, maybe even the greatest player who ever lived. His lifetime batting average is still the highest of all time, and when he retired in 1928, after twenty-one years with the Detroit Tigers and two with the Philadelphia Athletics, he held more than ninety records. But the numbers donÃ¢â ¬â„¢t tell half of CobbÃ¢â ¬â„¢s tale. The Georgia Peach was by far the most thrilling player of the era: Ã¢â ¬Å“Ty Cobb could cause more excitement with a base on balls than Babe Ruth could with a grand slam,Ã¢â ¬Â• one columnist wrote. When the Hall of Fame began in 1936, he was the first player voted in.But Cobb was also one of the gameÃ¢â ¬â„¢s most controversial characters. He got in a lot of fights, on and off the field, and was often accused of being overly aggressive. In his day, even his supporters acknowledged that he was a fierce and fiery competitor. Because his philosophy was to Ã¢â ¬Å“create a mental hazard for the other man,Ã¢â ¬Â• he had his enemies, but he was also widely admired. After his death in 1961, however, something strange happened: his reputation morphed into that of a monsterÃ¢â ¬â •a virulent racist who also hated children and women, and was in turn hated by his peers.How did this happen? Who is the real Ty Cobb? Setting the record straight, Charles Leerhsen pushed aside the myths, traveled to Georgia and Detroit, and re-traced CobbÃ¢â ¬â„¢s journey, from the shy son of a professor and state senator who was progressive on race for his time, to AmericaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s first true sports celebrity. In the process, he tells of a life overflowing with incident and a man who cut his own path through his timesÃ¢â ¬â •a man we thought we knew but really didnÃ¢â ¬â„¢t.

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## Customer Reviews

The conventional wisdom about Ty Cobb is that he was a vicious baseball player who spiked infielders on purpose, a vicious racist who couldn't be in the same room with a black person, and an all-around vicious human being who died friendless and hated. While never sugarcoating Cobb's enormous temper and willingness to brawlÃ¢â ¬â •facts Cobb himself never disputedÃ¢â ¬â •Leerhsen's remarkable new biography reaches back to primary documents that stand this wisdom on its head. The grandson of one of the few courageous abolitionist politicians in Georgia, Cobb was among the first to applaud the breaking of the color barrier, and there seems to be no evidence of his racism. The myth of Cobb's supposedly violent play was largely based on a handful of very minor affairs, which all the principals agreed were overblown, coupled with his psychological style, which tended to scare opponents but not hurt them physically. And his legend as a hated man is belied by the fact that he was truly baseball's first superstar, beloved by the nation, and only eclipsed when the lively ball (a style of baseball with an emphasis on home runs) and Babe Ruth supplanted his version of the game. Leerhsen finds that the myth of Cobb was perpetuated almost entirely by a single man, Al Stump, the ghostwriter of an autobiography commissioned by Cobb but never approved by him, as he was too sick to review it. No prior knowledge of Cobb or his myth is necessary to enjoy this book, although it will help. VERDICT This eminently readable biography is a fantastic piece of research and a perfect starting point for teens interested in the early years of baseball.Ã¢â ¬â •Mark Flowers, Rio Vista Library, CA --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Ã¢â ¬Å“No matter what you think of Ty Cobb, youÃ¢â ¬â„¢ll want to read Charles LeerhsenÃ¢â ¬â„¢s fascinating biography, as he dispels rumors, exposes frauds, and challenges everything you thought you knew about the most controversial individual ever to play the great game of baseball.Ã¢â ¬Â• (Kevin Baker, author of Sometimes You See It Coming)"Not only the best work ever written on this American sports legend: ItÃ¢â ¬â„¢s a major reconsideration of a reputation unfairly maligned for decades." (Allen Barra The Boston Globe)Ã¢â ¬Å“Superbly reported, wonderfully written and often quite funny, Charles LeerhsenÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Ty Cobb: A Terrible Beauty, is a highly enlightening and highly enjoyable book. A new Cobb emergesÃ¢â ¬â •many-faced and passionateÃ¢â ¬â •in this important, original view of a figure well installed in baseball lore. This is a first-rate book by a first-rate writer." (Kostya Kennedy, author of

56: Joe DiMaggio and the Last Magic Number in Sports)Ã¢â ¬Å“Surprise! It wasnÃ¢â ¬â„¢t the Georgia Peach who was prejudiced (especially), it was us, against him. LeerhsenÃ¢â ¬â„¢s feat of research brings the real Cobb home at last.Ã¢â ¬Â• (Roy Blount Jr., author of Alphabet Juice)"Ground-breaking, thorough and compelling. . . . The most complete, well-researched and thorough treatment of Cobb that has ever been written." (Bob D'Angelo Tampa Tribune)"Now Cobb has an advocate, one who's actually read all the old newspaper clippings (some of which flatly contradict common "knowledge"), visited the terrain, and interviewed as many relevant people as he could find. Cobb was indeed a bruised peach but, as the author shows convincingly, not a thoroughly rotten one." (Kirkus Reviews (starred review))"Leerhsen's magisterial reexamination presents a detailed view of Cobb culled from actual research rather than hearsay. . . . Thanks to exhaustive research, we now have a more realistic and sympathetic view of Cobb. . . . This is an important work for baseball and American historians as Cobb was one of the country's first true superstars." (Library Journal)"Leerhsen wraps his penetrating profile of Cobb in gripping play-by-play rundowns and a colorful portrait of the anarchic 'dead-ball' era, when players played drunk and fans chased offending umpires from the field. This is a stimulating evocation of baseballÃ¢â ¬â„¢s rambunctious youth and the man who epitomized it." (Publishers Weekly)"Charles Leerhsen has done baseball aficionados a great mercy by bringing to life Ty Cobb, the man and the ballplayerÃ¢â ¬â •warts and all, some might say. . . . And even more, Leerhsen summons up the days when baseball was young and innocent and, one thinks, filled with a kind of raw vitality that is missing today. . . . They donÃ¢â ¬â„¢t make them like thatÃ¢â ¬â •or like CobbÃ¢â ¬â •anymore. And the real Cobb is more compelling than the one of legend and film." (Geoffrey Norman The Weekly Standard)"A clear-eyed portrayal of Cobb not as a tyrant and not as a saint. It showcases Cobb as a flawed and vulnerable human being who, after suffering a nervous breakdown his second season, came back to fearlessly embrace his talent in an era that was just discovering what it meant to love baseball." (Anna Clark Detroit Free Press) --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Like many students of baseball history, I had always admired Cobb the player but believed Cobb the person much less admirable. I assumed he was simply a man of his time and place who could not overcome being born in the Deep South during segregation nor perhaps a natural inclination towards misanthropy. Charles LeerhsenÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Ty Cobb: A Terrible Beauty has convinced that nearly everything I ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“knewÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• about Cobb was wrong.Largely thanks to scholarship that emerged only at the very end of CobbÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s

life (and interestingly, at odds with evidence from much earlier periods) his reputation is that of a miserable, friendless, racist lout. When his name is invoked today, itÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s usually to denounce the hypocrisy of the Hall of FameÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s so-called ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“character clauseÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“if the Hall really cared about character, theyÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢d kick Cobb outÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•). Yet as Leerhsen notes this flies in the face of the simple fact that Cobb was not only in the very first Hall of Fame class, but received more votes than any other player including Babe Ruth, belying the notion that he was disliked by his contemporaries. African-Americans who personally knew him were quoted as saying they not only liked him, but loved him. So, where did the myth begin and why does it continue? An important part of A Terrible Beauty is helping us to understand how baseball has gotten a vital part of its own story so wrong.Time and time again, Leerhsen peels back numerous myths and subjects them to painstaking scrutiny. He accepts nothing at face value. His judicious use of evidence leaves us a much better understanding of this complicated man who was the best player of baseball in its purest form. The Cobb that emerges in LeerhsenÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s combination of biography, history and literature (for it is brilliantly written as well) is a fascinating contradiction. He was a man who exploited any perceived weakness on the ball field without a second thought. A fielder in what he (and other players of the era) considered his ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“right of wayÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• on the base paths did so at the risk of significant injury. But the same Cobb would also plead for leniency for a man who had stolen his car and took great pains to answer his fan mail religiously with advice, signing autographs and mailing photos, even courteously thanking the writer for the honor of the request.LeerhsenÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s readers are also treated to a superb description of the era in which Cobb played (a vital aspect of his story given how different the game was prior to 1920 when runs were scarce and home runs almost non-existent). CobbÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s determination first to get on base (lifetime OBP of .433) and move along the base paths until he scored (second only to Ricky Henderson in lifetime runs) was unparalleled. He was a serious student of the game who lacked the natural gifts of a Joe Jackson, but compensated by intellect and intensity. His greatest satisfaction was solving the puzzles of the diamond, and outsmarting opponents.Cobb was no saint. He got into his share of fights when his Southern sensibilities were aroused, but given what a rough and brutal age it was in general, and the behavior typical of the very blue collar class from which ball players generally emerged, he was not atypical of his generation in this regard.
LeehsenÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s mastery of the times in which Cobb lived is extraordinarily illuminating as no part of the Cobb myth is spared his careful appraisal. Given how manifestly incorrect our current perception of Ty Cobb is, then, this may be the most important baseball history book to have

been published in years.

Ty Cobb’s reputation had been destroyed over the years by people who wanted a villain in baseball and by one person in particular (Al Stump) who made the better part of career off ruining Cobb’s reputation. The low point in all of it was Ron Shelton’s film "Cobb" (based on Stump’s input) where Cobb was portrayed as a rapist, alcoholic, a murderer and drug addict who casually shot off guns in nightclubs without consequence when he wasn’t being racist or fixing baseball games. Stump’s reputation was destroyed a few years ago by revelations that he created large of fake Cobb items and forged documents when he sold to collectors. That somewhat set the stage for a reappraisal of Cobb’s life going back to solid primary sources. Leerhsen’s book is a very welcome corrective.He does what was necessary. He throws out all the assumptions and beliefs about Cobb. He looks at what we actually know of his life from solid sources and he compares his findings to the stories of previous authors. He shows a far more complicated Cobb. Cobb didn’t play baseball as a game. He saw two competitions in every "game". The team is trying to beat the other team but at the same time, every player on a team is in competition within the team for their "spot" or their position. He was a man who went all out in whatever he did and he didn’t have any romantic notions about sports.And yet the private Cobb outside of business and the "game" was often a generous man and a responsible man in terms of obligations. Its somewhat outside of modern expectations that the private life and business/public life of an individual can be so different. And yet that is Cobb.Leerhsen demolishes nearly all of the old stories that made Cobb into a racist fanatic. Most of the stories end up having no solid basis in fact. Cobb’s history, especially in retirement, is full of examples of him speaking in favor of integration in baseball. The bloodthirsty lunatic created by Al Stump is point by point done away with by the book.But the real man isn’t made perfect. He got into fights. He made enemies. He treated baseball like a war. But rather a story of a evil or crazy man, the author ends up telling the story of a complicated man. The book leaves the reader after somewhat with implicit questions about how far is too far in terms of competition and the literal will to win. What is the price of personal greatness?If he maybe didn’t sharpen his spikes, he was still going to use any and every form of intimidation on the baseball field. But as much as that was him, it was also that era. He might have done it better but he wasn’t the only one doing it.Its also worth noting that this is one of two excellent books published about Cobb this year. Tim Hornbaker’s "War on the Basepaths" is equally good. The difference between the two books is that while Leerhsen acts almost as a defense attorney making a positive case for Cobb, Hornbaker in his book acts far more like a judge weighing facts impartially and carefully with regard to many of the famous

incidents in Cobb’s life.

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