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**Myth and America's
National Pastime:
Jim Bouton's *Ball Four*
Changes Baseball's Image**

Steven B. Stone

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During the 1970 baseball season, while struggling with an ERA of around 5.50 for the unrenowned Houston Astros, pitcher Jim Bouton released a baseball book; a diary of the 1969 season. Realizing that he, as a ballplayer, was far from being considered a major league "star", he admitted to being "a little nervous that it (the book) might not get noticed at all."¹ The colossal attention his book received, however, not only exceeded his wildest dreams, but perhaps far exceeded his worst nightmares as well. Bouton's book was indeed "noticed," for in only a few short years it became the largest selling sports book in the history of the United States.² Book reviews varied from *New York Daily News* columnist Dick Young labelling the author "a social leper," to the *Boston Globe's* George Frazier declaring the book "an authentic revolutionary manifesto," to even Roger Angell recognizing it as "the funniest book of the year."³ As much as it was clearly America's most popular sports book, it was equally the nation's most controversial. *Ball Four* perhaps did more to change the image of our national pastime, to alter the perception of an institution which is the embodiment of some of our country's most sacred myths, than any other event or publication in the history of the game. Heroes are an aspect or part of myths, and some of our young nation's most revered heroes—Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Joe DiMaggio and Mickey Mantle—are products of the game. This paper discusses the myth or myths surrounding American baseball and then examines how Jim Bouton lead America to a changing view of its great National Pastime through the publication of his book *Ball Four*.

Myths are in a sense illusions; perceptions of events, people, or situations which reflect a society's beliefs and fantasies. They are, therefore, somewhat separated from reality, and their existence lies in the minds and thoughts of a population or culture. Myths are not an actual event, place, or happening, but rather an expression or depiction of them. Myths are expressed orally or in writing, and consequently, the study of myths is the study of what has been written and said about events and/or places, etc. This paper is, therefore, primarily a discussion of what has been written and said about the sport; a study of how it is perceived.

Every nation and every culture has its myths. The United States, being one of the world's younger nations, has had to create its own myths more from aspects of relatively modern culture. A large majority of Americans would probably consider our greatest hero to be George Washington, the first U.S. president and leader of our great democratic

Stone '86: Myth and America's National Pastime: Jim Bouton's Ball Four Chan tradition. Other names come to mind, such as Abraham Lincoln, savior of the Union and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who presided over World War II and the end of the great depression. But all of these figures are part of the political arena, and since politics are generally dull and tedious in the short term (and in many periods the long term as well), it is not astonishing that we look to the always exciting, always happening world of sports for many of our myths and heroes.⁴

Historians tend to believe that baseball lends itself more to myth than other American sports because of its age and propensity for statistics. Since the sport is old, it necessarily has developed a certain amount of tradition, and tradition, if not a prerequisite, is certainly a major factor in the creation of mythology. But perhaps more important is baseball's propensity for statistics. Heroics are quantified into a vast array of records such as Earned Run Average, Home Runs, Wins, Stolen Bases, Batting Average, Strike Outs, Runs Batted In, etc. *Harpers Magazine's* David Halberstam points out that "records (are) to be set and broken, new myths and heroes (are) to replace the old. In this . . . it is sharply different from pro football and pro basketball, where statistics are kept but are quite secondary to performance."⁵

Baseball then clearly has a certain disposition towards being adopted for mythological representation. Sports historian Richard Crepeau contends that in the 1920's, baseball tied itself to the "agrarian myth" which reflects the Jeffersonian ideal of rural individualism. This myth idealizes the countryside, the farmer boy with his fidelity, and frowns upon the big city as being paganistic and untrue.⁶ Evidences of this myth abound up to the mid-1960's. Every baseball fan knows that Mickey Mantle was born and raised in a small Oklahoma town, and most know of Bob Feller as the man who came straight off the farm with a blazing fastball at age 17. Casey Stengel is referred to in an article written about him by Mickey Mantle and Whitey Ford as a "turn-of-the-century athlete, country boy . . ." ⁷ And even as late as 1964, Dean Chance is referred to by *Newsweek* as "a farm boy sensation."⁸

Stars, however, were not always destined to play in the shadow of preconceived, popular myths. Many of the larger stars have had myths created around special aspects of their own unique characters. Aspects of their lives became dramatic stories of truth, justice, and courage.⁹ Babe Ruth was famous for visiting hospitalized children and little orphans, promising to "hit one out" for a particularly sick child. There was ironman Lou Gehrig, calmly and fearlessly facing a deadly disease, and Mickey Mantle, suffering injury after excruciating injury, yet coming back to hit even more tremendous, towering, game-winning home runs. Players of future generations were expected to live and play

by these ideals which the heroes of the past had created or followed. They were to hold, as these myths did, a certain wholesomeness and virtuousness. Attending events such as functions for under privileged kids, and just simply holding the values of a good, strong American citizen became expected of them.

These myths—and being exaggerations they are indeed generally myths—were created and maintained loyally by a vast array of sportswriters. Almost regardless of what a player did off the field, his image was somewhat protected and how he was perceived was to some degree controlled. He, therefore, was not entirely responsible for his off the field actions, for the general rule among sports writers was that irresponsible or socially unacceptable behavior was to be ignored. Babe Ruth was once sidelined, for instance, for eating too many hot dogs, not for having social disease.¹⁰

People and cultures like their myths. In their continuity they find comfort and they therefore do not like to see them changed. As Jim Bouton discovered in the aftermath of *Ball Four*, “Baseball players are like people. They enjoy the legends and the myths they’ve grown up with and they don’t like to see them blurred.”¹¹ By the late 1950’s early 1960’s, a triangle of players, sportswriters, and fans had managed to inclose themselves in their own unique creation of mythological characters and ideas, and they seemed quite content to maintain this situation as the status quo.

But as the 1960’s progressed, the cozy world of baseball experienced a period of drastic change brought on by an alteration of the attitudes and values of the country. This alteration of attitudes or “invisible spirit” enveloping the nation was defined by Mr. Mike Burke, president of the New York Yankees, as “the changing velocity of American life.”¹² Many considered the 1960’s as the beginning of the space age, and by the end of the decade a man was to walk on the moon. Red Barber, who was at the microphone for Bobby Thompson’s historic ninth-inning, pennant-clinching home run relates that “the plain fact is, baseball just hasn’t kept up with the times. When I was growing up, baseball truly was the National Pastime. Kids today move to a more insistent beat, the yimpy pace of the space age, and, instead of keeping up, the game has been slowing down.”¹³ Other sports were catching up to and exceeding baseball in popularity. “I think (baseball) has not kept up with the velocity of American life, the jet age, instant gratification (and) instant action, the way others sports have,” insists David Halberstam of *Harpers Magazine*.¹⁴

Television was widely viewed as a leading culprit in baseball’s declining popularity. Football and basketball with their instant,

Stone '86: Myth and America's National Pastime: Jim Bouton's Ball Four Chan concentrated action televised particularly well, whereas baseball did not. Paul Weiss, professor of philosophy at Catholic University believes that baseball was badly distorted by television. "It's not the real game. It's too slow and becomes just pitcher against batter. They ignore the interaction in the outfield. The spectator is being cheated."¹⁵

Obviously, the problem here was speed. In our new, frantic space age, the game of baseball was just too darn slow. Articles, studies, and newscasts lamented the game's incessant slowness and lack of action. Red Barber compares the Yankees "murderers row" and its .307 batting average with the entire 1968 American league which had one .300 hitter pacing the rest of the league at a .301 clip. He concludes that, "baseball must regain excitement and motion, action and pace."¹⁶ Many tests were conducted—resulting in many figures and statistics being obtained—which showed just how slow the old sport was. Mark Harris of *New York Times Magazine* reports the following. "In time motion studies conducted last season in Baltimore, they saw that half a game of baseball is 'dead time' between pitches, that one-fifth is 'dead time' between innings, that one quarter is 'dead time' passed in miscellaneous ways (catcher rubs up the ball, players confer, replacements enter the game, batter goes for new bat, etc.) and that only the remaining 5 per cent is devoted to actual play. To anyone with a passion for continuous, ceaseless action these are very bad numbers . . ."¹⁷

Adding to these problems were the Denny McLain and Curt Flood controversies leading off the 1970 baseball season. Curt Flood was taking baseball to court in an attempt to outlaw its reserve system on constitutional grounds. It was a bitter fight which was to last for a number of years. During this feud, Flood once commented that it was inevitable—that "sooner or later, someone would challenge baseball's right to treat human beings like used cars."¹⁸ The Denny McLain affair, on the other hand, dealt with McLain's suspension from baseball for his admitted involvement with Flint, Mich., bookies in 1967. The real controversy arose when Commissioner Bowie Kuhn announced that his suspension would end on July 1 of that same year, allowing him to finish the entire second half of the season. There was widespread suspicion that the Commissioner's compassion resulted from the fact that McLain had been a 30-game winner the previous year.¹⁹

Baseball clearly had some major problems to start off the 1970 season. The game was obviously too slow for a changing American population, a new Commissioner was making highly controversial, unpopular decisions, and one of its star players was taking the game to court on constitutional grounds in an attempt to keep it from treating its players "like used cars." Then at about mid-season, Jim Bouton and his book

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Ball Four appeared on the scene. The whole baseball world was in uproar even before the actual book was released, for, as Bouton explains, “the shit hit the fan when the excerpts began running in *Look* in May, and I was besieged all the time.”²⁰ These excerpts in *Look* were all that were really necessary to cause the fuss which the book created.) This was true largely because the editor, Larry Shector, managed to include in the *Look* articles all of the key, controversial passages Bouton’s book contained. When Bowie Kuhn called in Jim Bouton later that season to “discuss” the book, his knowledge of its contents rested solely on the excerpts he had read in *Look*. He, as was the case with many of the book’s other critics, had not even read the book!

Ball Four was obviously not your ordinary dull, drab baseball book. Other supposed “diaries” of a baseball season had been written in the past, but they were generally conservative and unrevealing. Jim Brosnan’s book *Pennant Race*, published in 1962, was a fairly popular diary of the Cincinnati Reds’ previous pennant winning season. It portrayed the bullpen as “a wire gate (which) leads back under the stands, where several benches provide room to sit and watch the game, catch a quick nap, read *Playboy*, or discuss world affairs.”²¹ His anecdotes about life on the road generally resembled the following. “Eventually they send around a little-bitty maid about four feet tall. We stand around watching her clean up the room so we can go to bed. Half an hour later a dog starts barking next door! He shuts up and five minutes later a duck quacks! In a hotel! To hell with ‘em.”²² Comments about fellow players proved overwhelmingly favorable, and his stories about fellow player’s faults were generally light in nature. Referring to Alvin Dark’s batting slump, Brosnan tells how “the frustration tore at his soul, and Alvin, who eschews profanity, often released his pent-up self-torment by slinging his batting helmet around the dugout . . . Occasionally many benchwarmers are bruised by helmet-slingers.”²³ *Pennant Race* was a success as far as baseball books are concerned, but it revealed nothing new about the baseball world, nothing pragmatic was said, and no myths or illusions about the baseball world and its players were tampered with.

Jim Bouton’s *Ball Four*, on the other hand, was anything but lacking in pragmatism. The book talks at length about sex, stars, drugs, and kissing games among the players on the bus. The whole tone of the book is completely different than that of Brosnan’s *Pennant Race*. “If you want to know what aspect of the moon landing was discussed most in the bullpen,” asks Bouton, “it was the sex life of the astronauts. We thought it a terrible arrangement that they should have to go three weeks or more without any sex life.”²⁴ This, as can be observed, is a tell-all book that pulls no punches when describing the private lives of

Stone '86: Myth and America's National Pastime: Jim Bouton's *Ball Four* Chan major league baseball players. "Baseball players are not, by and large, the best dates." He explains: "They prefer wham, bam, thank-you ma'm affairs."²⁵ He tells of the "odd sort of sexual liberation among baseball players - a verbal one." For instance, Gary Bell would "go up to Ray Oyler and say, 'Ray, when you come to the ball park tomorrow, will you bring my socks? I left them under your bed.'" Or sometimes you'd get this kind of conversation: Player 1, "Gee, your wife was great last night." Player 2, "Oh, she wasn't all that great." Player 1, "You should have been there earlier. She was terrific."²⁶

All of the preceding and following quotations were included in the *Look* excerpts so they were, of course, available to the baseball world early in the controversy. The art of "beaver shooting" as described by Bouton, was the aspect of his book most shocking to some. Bouton's description of a beaver shooter is that he is "at bottom, a Peeping Tom. Beaver shooting can be anything from peering over the top of the dugout to look up dresses, to hanging from the fire escape on the 20th floor of some hotel to look into a window." ". . . in baseball if you shoot a particularly good beaver, you are a highly respected person, a folk hero of sorts. The Yankees would go up there (the top of the Shoreham hotel) in squads of 15 or so, often led by Mickey Mantle himself."²⁷

One of baseball's greatest heroes, Mickey Mantle, was being portrayed as some sort of pervert, a Peeping Tom. And to make matters worse, he could be highly respected by other players for doing so. Jim Bouton did more, however, than reveal The Mick as a Peeping Tom. He told how Mantle could simply be rude and insensitive at times. For instance, "there were all those times he'd push little kids aside when they wanted his autograph, and the times when he was snotty to reporters, just about making them crawl and beg for a minute of his time. I've seen him slam a bus window on kids trying to get his autograph. And I hated that look of his, when he'd get angry at somebody and cut him down with a glare."²⁸ He also reveals Gary Bell's opinion that "Yastremski is for himself first and second, and the hell with everybody else."²⁹ This unfavorable, backstabbing talk about baseball's biggest stars was something entirely new. The myth of the virtuous athlete was being directly attacked.

But *Ball Four* was controversial for other reasons as well. It was previously known that "greenies" or "uppers" were used in baseball, for Jim Brosnan even refers to their use in *Pennant Race*, but Jim Bouton somehow managed to shed a stronger light on the subject. "Greenies," he says, "are pep pills - dextroamphetamine sulfate - and a lot of ballplayers couldn't function without them."³⁰ When Bouton asked a teammate how many major-leaguers he thought took greenies, the answer was, "a lot more than half. A lot of the guys on the Baltimore

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team take them. A lot of the Tigers. Most of the guys on this club. And that's just what I know for sure."³¹

Probably the final, and surely the oddest, controversial subject covered in *Ball Four*, was the kissing game that went on for a short time among the players. "After awhile, some of the guys began to walk up to each other and pretend to kiss on the lips. In fact, one of them would put his hand on the other's face and kiss the back of it. If you did it fast, it looked like a real kiss. Then we got a little drunk on a bus one night, and the guys started kissing without bothering to put their hands up."³² This, surely, was not a game of champions and heroes.

Bouton's original hope for *Ball Four* was that "they'll read the book - everybody in baseball will read the book - and they'll have a good laugh. Maybe they'll make a few policy changes to correct the evils I discussed . . . and accept the book as mature adults should. I thought that, I really did."³³ But Bouton's ideal for the book was far from met. Critics and proponents alike were less concerned with changing some of the problems he mentioned (Greenies), and focused more on his projection of the major league ball player, namely Mickey Mantle. Joe Cronin, president of the American League, said, "It's the most derogatory thing and the worst thing for baseball I've ever seen. He's got ballplayers sleeping with each other's wives. He's got them being Peeping Toms. He's even got them kissing each other. I've never read anything so bad in my whole life."³⁴ The object of highest concern here was obviously the disruption of the superhuman, almost immortal image held of the "homo baseballus."

"What Jim Bouton has done, then," proclaimed Richard Tobin of the *Saturday Review*, "is to tell the average fan what really goes on during the twenty-four hours of a ballplayer's life, especially on the road."³⁵ Another reviewer notes that, "reading Bouton, the baseball players became what they are, not larger than life, but perhaps, if anything, a little smaller."³⁶ *Ball Four* resulted in a rash of insiders proclaiming that yes, baseball players were and always had been this way. Richard Tobin, who travelled with the old St. Louis Cardinals of Dizzy Dean and Pepper Martin, writes - "We have probably seen every off-field antic Mr. Bouton describes and a few he could never publish, not even in these permissive days." About the only thing ballplayers didn't have available to them that they have now are 'greenies,' pep pills probably more dangerous than they're worth since they can induce malnutrition and neurosis. But yesterday's ballplayers are themselves little or no different from the way Roger Lipsyte recently described Jim Bouton's pals in *The New York Times*; "Twenty-five young, insecure, undereducated men of narrow skills keep circling the country to play before fans who do not understand their problems or their work and

Stone '86: Myth and America's National Pastime: Jim Bouton's *Ball Four* Chan who use them as symbols for their own fantasies.³⁷ A man from

Chicago wrote Bouton that "I was in that same Tacoma dressing room 22-23 years ago!! It was just as bad then, in the old Western International League. . . . We had some real 'beavers' too."³⁸ Baseball players, it seems, are just like regular people, and they always have been. Amazingly they share the same problems, the same needs, and the same desires as everyone else.

It is interesting that the greatest critical outcry against the book came from the sportswriters and baseball players. Dick Young, the man who labelled Bouton a "social leper," also sneeringly accused Bouton of writing "the way lovesick little girls used to do it in the time of Louisa May Alcott."³⁹ Joe Pepitone adds, "I've seen Mickey break down and cry because he thought he wasn't doing enough for the team. He gives eight hundred per cent. He had an image and I don't think Jim should have torn it down like that. It wasn't necessary to say all those things. I just don't think it was necessary."⁴⁰ Bouton believes that "The sad fact is, people don't want to know the truth, they don't want to hear bad news."⁴¹ When the publisher of *Ball Four* cut the manuscript, the section in which Bouton talked about the Yankees staying out late and partying whenever they played in Los Angeles was crossed out, and a note was attached to the margin asking - "Is this possible?"⁴² What Marvin Miller, head of the Major League Players Association, noticed about the sportswriters was that he "never heard . . . someone say the book is a pack of lies. That's an interesting omission."⁴³ And indeed it was true that sportswriters rarely questioned the book as being a pack of lies, but rather they questioned the right of Bouton to tell it. This phenomenon had previously arisen, and was to rise again in other areas of American society. When the My Lai story initially broke, there was anger among fellow journalists towards the men who reported it.⁴⁴ A similar reaction greeted the team of Woodward and Bernstein in their reporting of the Watergate scandal.

So the question, considering all the friction against Jim Bouton's *Ball Four*, is how or why did the book become such a hit. The answer lies with the fans. A few, like the sportswriters and players, were upset by the book. A youth from Bronx, New York, wrote Bouton; "We are rudely disturbed by the way you criticized [sic] many ballplayers especially [sic] Joe Pepitone, Mickey Mantle, Elston Howard, etc."⁴⁵ But a vast majority of fan responses were in praise of Bouton's work. One fan wrote to *Look* magazine, "Is it true what they say about baseball players? Yes, they are overpaid, overconfident, oversexed individuals who speak poor English, have low IQs and a one-track mind."⁴⁶ And from the same magazine, "At last he has revealed to us the forbidden facts of major-league baseball. At last he has exposed the heroes and toppled

them from their pedestals. Mickey Mantle, Carl Yastrzemski. Wonderful, Jim - great job."⁴⁷ Another fan writes, "If baseball can't stand to have something written about it that is not hero-worshipful to a nauseating degree, it's in deep trouble."⁴⁸ Bouton himself received many letters, including this one: "It really is about time that someone knocked them off their pedestals and revealed the truth (that they're not heroes off of Wheaties boxes but just men - horny men at that!)"⁴⁹

Eventually, even sportswriters and professional people got into the act. A professor of psychology from Mitchell College, N.C., wrote Bouton the following letter. "For too long America has idolized its baseball players as some kind of gods whose integrity and superhuman qualities must never be questioned. What your book did for me was to make me realize that baseball players . . . are subject to the same pressures, the same tensions, and problems that confront us all."⁵⁰ *The New York Times* sportswriter Bob Lipsyte writes, "His anecdotes and insights are enlightening, hilarious and, most important, unavailable elsewhere. They breathe a new life into a game choked by pontificating statisticians, image conscious officials and scared ballplayers."⁵¹ And George G. Hill of *The Christian Century*; "Life will be better if people will recognize their idols as idols and quit worshipping them. Jim Bouton's book . . . makes a contribution to the needed deidolizing of the American Way of Life by desacralizing one of its holy symbols . . ." ⁵² Wilfred Sheed of *Life* was probably right on target when he noted, "For all the pious whinnies over Bouton's book, the baseball establishment can probably stand having the players exposed - in fact it may even be good for business: top-dollar adults were getting awfully tired of the short-haired, cliché-bearing prigs we used to get . . ." ⁵³

All through the 1960's, baseball seemed to be on the decline. Attendance was dropping year after year and television seemed to favor faster-paced sports such as football and basketball. Sportswriters continually pointed out that baseball was too slow, that it was failing to keep up with the fast pace of American life. A mass of new rules were proposed to "liven up" the game and many were seriously considered. Among them were: Narrowing home plate from 17 to 15 inches, reducing the size of fielders' gloves, lowering the pitcher's mound (again), moving back the pitcher's mound two feet, bringing the outfield fences in closer to the plate, etc.⁵⁴ But perhaps all those sportswriters and speculators were, as they say, barking up the wrong tree. Yes, the ideals of America were changing during this time, but a desire for speed and action were not the only aspects of this change. This was also a period of growing anti-war movements and increasing discontent with the image of "America the Beautiful." The United States had always portrayed itself as virtuous and true, coming to the

Stone '86: Myth and America's National Pastime; Jim Bouton's *Ball Four* Chan heroic aid of its righteous, democratic allies when they were threatened by the obviously evil, domineering German regimes. But Americans in the 1960's began to see their involvement in conflicts such as the Korean and Vietnam war as not so justified and true. There arose an increasing awareness that communists were people too, not just the little red devils we had imagined them to be. The nation's citizens were beginning to discover that America was not always so virtuous. It suffered from the same short sightedness and prejudices, it seemed, that other nations did. At times we appeared downright wrong. We were a nation that, at times, refused to serve a certain race of people in restaurants because of the color of their skin, and we were a nation whose army had literally wiped out a village of seemingly innocent men, women and children in Vietnam. American citizens were clearly losing faith in the whole myth that surrounded America.

It is not surprising, by the same token, that Americans were tiring of the myth of the baseball player. The image of superhuman, larger-than-life stars seemed increasingly unreal. In short, people were getting impatient with the stale, phony image of the baseball player who adorned baseball cards and cereal boxes. Americans, it seemed, wanted real people, and in Jim Bouton's *Ball Four* that is exactly what they got. Shortly after the book was released, baseball Commissioner Bowie Kuhn called Bouton into his office in an effort to obtain a public apology from him for writing the book. Bouton, however, refused to oblige and told the Commissioner, "I think it gives an accurate view of what baseball and baseball players are like. As a result, I think people will be more interested in baseball, not less. I think people are turned off by the phony goody-goody image. So I think you're wrong about what's good or bad for baseball."⁵⁵ Marvin Miller, head of the Major League Players Association, also attended the meeting and told the Commissioner something like this. "What you're saying is that what was good about the past was that the public had this image of the player wearing a halo. But I believe fans today are different. They're a lot more sophisticated and a lot more concerned with players as human beings. I could well make a case that something which took away this phony, unrealistic view of the life of a professional player and showed that it was a great deal more down to earth could be very good for baseball."⁵⁶

The popularity of Major League Baseball has increased steadily since 1970, and attendance records are now broken regularly. Attendance rose from below 25 million in 1968, to about 38 million in 1977.⁵⁷ Obviously, one cannot prove these figures to be a direct result of Jim Bouton's demythologizing of the baseball player. However, considering the mass wave of fan approval supporting his book, the remarks made by those close to the baseball scene that it "breathed new life into the

game,” and the fact that *Ball Four* became the greatest selling sports book of all time, one can conclude that a strong connection definitely does exist.

Even though *Ball Four* was published 16 years ago in 1970, its effects are still felt in the baseball world today. Ted Simmons, a 16-year veteran of the Major Leagues, commented on the book in 1984 much the same way people did in the early 1970's. “To whatever extent people appreciate, or don't appreciate, what Bouton's book did, one would have to say his coverage of pro athletes revolutionized the role that journalism plays,” he says. “I think, quite frankly, it was a move for the better. Whether you like it or not, he humanized athletes. . . . They (the fans) want to know about us. Bouton showed us just how badly. . . . I think it is better this way. It forces you to be a human being. Forty years ago nobody was watching, so you could be anybody you wanted as a human being. . . . you didn't have to be responsible for your actions. Today, because of Bouton. . . . his book forced all of us to be human beings.”⁵⁸

But now in the 1980's, people do not like the human beings they are seeing so up close and personal in the Major Leagues. As Tracy Ringolsby of *Sport* magazine explains, “Players find themselves characterized - by fans, management and the press - as overpaid, undertalented and chemically dependent. . . . Their love of the national pastime has become a subject of debate. What was once ignored (like pay) or considered colorful (like getting drunk) is now worthy of public ridicule”⁵⁹ Ken Singleton complains that people are concerned too much in particular with the personal life of baseball players. “[People] don't see themselves in the role of a Michael Jackson or Burt Reynolds.” He says. “They don't see themselves on the movie screen or on television or making albums. But as soon as athletes make a good salary they get upset. I feel that's unfair because we are entertainers, too.”⁶⁰ “It is not fair,” says Pete Rose, “When a guy is accused of taking drugs, right away everybody thinks all players do. It is very unfair. I bet there's no more percentage of players taking drugs than percentage of policemen or carpenters or whatever.”⁶¹ It seems that, although Bouton dented and damaged the myth of the ballplayer, he did not necessarily destroy it. Today our culture is trying to put baseball back into its role as representative of our country's values and ideals, only now they are trying to do so by changing the players themselves, rather than by hiding their true actions.

Currently in 1986, there is a strong faction pushing for mandatory drug testing of all Major League ballplayers. Their main concern is with image. If ballplayers are perceived as drug users, then the youth - who obtain their values and beliefs from such mythological figures - will be

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influenced towards these same activities. But the approach to protecting
this image is not through sportswriters attempting to hide or cover up
examples of drug use. Quite to the contrary, some seem to put extreme
time and effort into revealing just such stories. The answer in this
situation, as previously mentioned, seems to be to alter the players
behavior directly. Upholding the "proper" image of ballplayers has
become, once again, a matter of primary importance to the
establishment. If it is allowed to slide it will be bad for the game, and
bad for America as well.

Myths, such as the myth of the American baseball hero, do not
control the values and attitudes of a culture, but rather the beliefs,
attitudes, and values of a culture determine the myths which a nation
holds sacred. America seems to have completed a full circle in regard
to its values and beliefs in the last 40 years. The late 1940's and early
1950's were a time of strong pro-Americanism. Slowly, a period of
discontent or anti-Americanism took over, culminating in the late
1960's and early 1970's around the Vietnam war and the deidolization
of America. Today, in 1986, American values are becoming more and
more conservative and pro-American in the administration of Ronald
Reagan. Baseball, being an institution which is the embodiment of
some of our country's most sacred myths, has of course felt the effects
of shifting American values. In 1970, Jim Bouton's *Ball Four* showed us
how much we were tired of superhuman baseball heroes, and his
deidolization of them seemed to revive interest in the game. Today, the
acceptance of mandatory drug testing would be a unique change in the
game, and even its consideration represents an alteration of its image
and the myth surrounding it. But it will, perhaps take a period
of time - a period of separation from the events of today, and the
gathering of events which will occur in the near future - to see how the
new America of the 1980's again changes our perception of the
National Pastime.

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- ³ Bouton, *I'm Glad*, pp. 11, 139, 145.
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- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 84.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 95.
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