



The Baseball: Stunts, Scandals, and Secrets Beneath the Stitches

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The holy grail, the fountain of youth, the golden fleece, and the baseball: rarely do objects inspire such madness. *The Baseball* is a salute to the ball, filled with insider trivia, anecdotes, and generations of ball-induced insanity.

Which Hall of Famer once caught a ball dropped from an airplane?

Why do balls get stamped with invisible ink?

What's the best ticket to buy for catching a foul ball?

Which part of the ball once came from dog food companies?

How could a 10,000-year-old glacier help a pitcher grip the ball?

In this enlightening, entertaining, and often wildly funny book, Zack Hample shares ballpark legends and lore, details the evolution of the ball, and offers up his secret methods for snagging your own from major league games.

The Baseball: Stunts, Scandals, and Secrets Beneath the Stitches Details

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From Reader Review The Baseball: Stunts, Scandals, and Secrets Beneath the Stitches for online ebook

Heather C. says

The newest offering from my favorite baseball geek, Zack Hample. Lots of interesting stories about baseball (not the game, the actual ball) scandals, legends, injuries, etc. Fun, obscure stuff like a rule that indicates how expensive and valuable a baseball in the 1870s was---if the ball couldn't be found, or landed somewhere inconvenient, play stopped and all the players started hunting. If it couldn't be found after 5 minutes, the ump called for a new one. A far cry from the MLB balls today which are only used in a few plays at most.

Also a cool chapter on the physical making of a ball (20,000 cows a year for the leather, but, as Hample states, those cows don't die to make baseballs, they die because people like to eat them...) The history that might be boring is made otherwise by Hample's wit and enthusiasm.

I was a little disappointed when, just over halfway through the book, the history and factual stuff ended and the remainder was devoted to Hample's advice on how to snag baseballs at games (he's snagged around 4500) and bios of other 'ballhawks'. Also, at the end he devotes 11 full pages to name every single MLB player/staff who has ever given him a baseball. I realize this was a labor of love for him, and snagging balls is his love, but I enjoyed the more substantial parts, and wished for more of them.

Tommy Carlson says

This book is, essentially, a documentary about the baseball itself. It covers the history of the ball, along with the many variations on the orb. The most interesting piece to me is the middle section, detailing a visit to the secret Rawlings baseball factory. (Yes, it really is a secret.)

The author is a collector of balls. He's a ball-hawk, roaming the ballpark with his glove in the hopes of snagging yet another foul ball or home run. So, to him, the final third of the book, full of tips and tricks to snagging a ball of your own, probably reads like pure genius.

Alas, to me it read like filler, padding out the book from it's tasty cork core.

Still, it's a worthy read if you like baseball, the game. But be warned that you may be tempted to set it down towards the end.

Chelsea says

I would dearly love to give this book two reviews, in large part because it is two different books poorly smashed together.

The first two parts (or, the first 200 pages) are a historical look at the baseball - the object itself, rather than the sport that it shares a name with. Sure, you can't separate the two, but at the same time, the importance of the physical baseball can be easily overlooked. Going back to the days when baseballs were valuable enough that it was written into the league rules that the winning team got to keep the ball from the game, Hample shares all kinds of facts that, while not previously unknown, have not been put together as a book.

And that was all well and good - a fun read for a baseball dork/history geek like myself.

Then we reached part three.

In which Zack Hample decides to remind his readers why he managed to get a book published.

For those who don't know, Hample is semi-notorious in baseball circles for, as he puts it, "snagging more than 4,600 baseballs from 48 different major league stadiums". And, lucky reader, he's going to tell you his tricks, so that you, too, can shout at major league baseball players during batting practice in the hope that they will toss you a baseball.

That part gets a 1, for being stupid (catching a baseball at a game is neat, especially if it's a home run ball. making it your profession is a little skeezy) and for the self-satisfaction just *wafting* off the page.

Without part three, I probably would have given this one a four. Alas, Zack Hample managed to ruin Zack Hample's book.

Brooke Bailey says

The Baseball by Zack Hample was not as good of a book as I thought it was going to be. I like baseball and do not mind reading about it, but this book was just not interesting enough to keep my attention. It had no actual plot line with no characters. It was mostly about Hample's experiences as he traveled to snag baseballs from different baseball fields. It was comical at times but became boring very quickly. Zack Hample's story about snagging balls was interesting and his advice to reader's was helpful. I recommend this book to people that enjoy baseball trivia/facts and the insanity involved with baseball. If you are interested in snagging baseballs like Hample himself, you would be entertained by this book.

jeremy says

one would think, perhaps, with all the many thousands of books written about baseball over the decades (now centuries?), there would be little to add in the way of novelty or insight regarding the greatest game ever devised by man. zack hample's new book, *the baseball: stunts, scandals, and secrets beneath the stitches*, however, would prove one were mistaken in such a presumption. behind the history, the rivalries, and the legends of the game is the often overlooked object that makes it all possible in the first place: the baseball.

hample, a well-known ballhawk who has snagged nearly 4,700 baseballs at major league stadiums around the country since his first in 1990, is obviously an ardent lover of all things related to the game, and his passion is evident throughout the book. *the baseball* is divided into three parts: the first two chronicle "the cultural and historical awesomeness of baseballs" and the third offers how-to tips and advice on procuring balls at major league games. hample includes chapters on the souvenir craze, the baseball in pop culture, and those unfortunate few actually killed by baseballs.

in one early chapter, *the baseball* provides a nearly year-by-year account of the intriguing and often controversial evolution of the baseball, and if there is one constant to be gleaned from its history, it's that

claims of adulterated or "juiced" balls have persisted practically since the game began. hample recounts his trip to the rawlings baseball factory in costa rica, as well as the exacting standards employed during the ball's manufacturing. for many, the seventy-some instructional pages on how to catch, find, chase, and be thrown baseballs at major league games will be the most exciting (and relevant) part of the book.

hample writes well enough, and his enthusiasm and humor make for an entertaining read. *the baseball* is sure to captivate even those with but a mild interest in the national pastime. for those more devoted fans, however, something rejuvenating awaits within this book's pages, something that may well have you daydreaming about the unforgettable experience of a summer afternoon at the ballpark- and the singular thrill of a home run or foul ball arcing its way towards your seat.

i'm still not quite sure how to describe it, but if there's one thing i've learned from going to hundreds of games and snagging thousands of balls and meeting tens of thousands of fans, it's that there's something about baseball that makes people crazy. this book is a celebration of the ball- and of those people."

Bfg1971 says

This was a fun quick read. The first half of the book is literally an history of the baseball. I mean the ball itself: how it's made, how it used to be made, what it's made out of, etc. The second half of the book is about how to get yourself one of these balls free at a major league ballpark. "Ballhawks" are fans who go to parks with the intention not necessarily of seeing a game but for the purpose of collecting baseballs. The author is a self-proclaimed ballhawk with a collection of over 4000 used baseballs. He breaks down some protips about how to collect balls and rates the 10 best ballparks to get them and where to stand.

Matt Simmons says

A book that's sure to be entertaining for some, though I felt it was terribly uneven. If you're a "ballhawk," or an aspiring one, this book, on the whole, is for you. If you're interested in how baseballs--the physical objects themselves--and how they figure in popular culture, then the opening pages, the first section, are for you. If you're like me, a baseball history nerd, then the middle section is your cup of tea. The chapters about how the baseball is made (an incredible process!!) and how baseballs have evolved since the 1860s (and how this has affected the evolution of the game) are just really great reads.

Unfortunately, those two chapters are the only ones that held my interest for any period of time. The others, I found myself skimming. Hample is a good writer, an interesting character his own self, and has a real knowledge of the game. I think this book just tries to do too much, to go in too many directions, to be too many things to too many people, to work as a whole. The parts are solid, and even excellent. The whole feels messy and unsatisfying.

Chip'sBookBinge says

I like to think that I know a lot about Baseball and I do. But I don't know everything. The history of the game is well over 100 years old and is next to impossible to know everything out there about the game. This is the reason why I gave The Baseball a chance. It seemed like it was going to open up a Pandora's box of more never-before-heard-of tidbits about the game.

Well, there were quite a few things that I had never heard of till I read this book. But there were also plenty of things that were rehashed given the fact that some of the stories were well-known and most baseball fans would have already known about prior to this book.

This book did not live up to what I thought it was going to be. It started off one way and then turned into something else all together. The first four chapters to me is where the fun is. All the stories here are extremely engaging even if you have heard of them before. After this, it's all down hill. The rest of the book is devoted to the making of a Baseball and how it's put together. And then it gets to what the book is really about: Ballhawkers.

Ballhawkers are those people that are at games for the sole purpose of getting as many baseballs as humanely possible, be it during batting practice or snagging foul balls and home runs during the actual games. Once I realize that the best part of the book was already long gone, it dawned on me that this book is nothing more than self congratulatory "how to become a successful" ballhawker. I say self congratulatory because it's really about the author Zack Hample bragging about how many baseball's he has snagged over his lifetime. Hell, there is a section devoted entirely to other Top 10 Ballhawkers in a Q & A section. This was just a little redundant and unnecessary and a waste of time. This and a lot of other useless things are in the book for the sole purpose of padding the pages as much as possible to make the book "legit" in size.

A good chunk of the book goes into the ins and outs of where to position yourself for the balls as well as what Baseball parks are the best and worst for ballhawkers. One section of the book, Zack completely dropped the ball in regards to the history of Commemorative Baseballs through the years regarding stamps and stitches from the All-Star games, World Series, Playoffs and other special occasions He touts how cool and different these balls are from regular season balls, and yet, all the photos are in black and white. Dude, if your going to have a chapter on this, at least have color pictures to back up what it is your going ga-ga over.

I would only recommend this book to those that are already ballhawkers. Nope, I wouldn't recommend it to them either. Check it out at the Library for just the first four chapters only.

Jen says

My brain is officially full of wacky baseball crap.

Like what's in a baseball (rubber, cork, lots of yarn)

Where it's made (Costa Rica, baseball sewers can do as many as 200 a week)

How to snag baseballs (turns out "please" is effective)

Honestly, at times this book was ridiculously uninteresting. At times, I was thinking if I dropped my ereader, then I wouldn't have to finish this book. Honestly, don't give a hoot about the top ten ballhawks (people who snag baseballs at games). And wow, that history of the baseball almost made me weep with pain.

Other times, it was really interesting, like how the first baseballs were sewn, what causes the differences in how baseballs act, and why the Rockies keep their baseballs in a humidor. (Obviously, "interesting" might be a subjective term.)

So it's a mix. The minutia can get brain numbing, and then one little minute fact will make you keep reading because suddenly you're interested again.

Oh and the author...wow, does he like baseball.

Dave says

Right away, if you aren't a baseball fan and at least somewhat knowledgeable about the game, skip this book. If you're still reading this review, know that the book is not about the game, its about the ball. That's right - the baseball. Zack Hample is what's known as a 'ballhawk'. That's a fan (almost always guys), who try to catch, snag, or otherwise acquire major league baseballs during games, spring training, batting practice, and so on. Some of the die-hards, including Hample, have acquired thousands. His book is about ballhawking, the baseball and its history, and baseball trivia - LOTS of baseball trivia. Fans will find some parts interesting and some not so much. I liked most of the trivia. Its the kind of book that you can read a page or 5 pages or ten, put it down and pick it up a week or month later and carry on. Hence, the perfect 'reading-room' book, if you catch my drift. My one piece of advice is don't spend a lot to purchase this one.

Tony says

UPDATE - 7/16/2015

If you read my original review, *infra*, then you already know that Zack Hample is not on my Christmas card list. I am updating to let you know that while many of you do not believe in GOD, I, at least, believe heartily in the God of Symmetry. Symmeteria, I think the Greeks called her. And Symmeteria has spoken. Douchebags of the world, unite!

Not a book about baseball; a book about THE BASEBALL. Ok, so it necessarily is about baseball, too, but this is really a homage to the ball itself. So, you can learn here how the ball is made, how the ball has changed, whether it is or was ever 'juiced' or not, who was killed by a baseball, does a curveball really curve, who is believed to have thrown the fastest pitch, who killed a bird as it coincidentally swooped in front of a batter and why players don't try to catch baseballs dropped from airplanes any more. You can also learn what TV shows have episodes involving foul balls and which celebrities have snagged foul balls, from Doug

Flutie, who always takes a glove to a game, to Justin Bieber.

I'm a baseball fan, so I knew a lot of this already, including the river where they get the mud from that they rub on new baseballs before every game. Regardless, stories about baseball, and even *baseballs*, are invariably fun, even if you've heard them before.

But there's a second part or theme to this book. See, the author, Zack Hample, is what's known as a 'ballhawk'. Ballhawks are people who go to baseball games for the primary purpose of getting a baseball. Doesn't matter how. They can find it in the stands when they enter (an Easter Egg), catch a batting practice or game foul ball or homer, or just have a player or coach toss them one. As Hample explains, he can be at a great game between two teams fighting for the post-season, a nail-biter, but if he only gets one batting practice ball that day, he's bummed. On the other hand, if he's at a meaningless game between two last place teams but gets (as he once did) 32 balls, then all's right with the world.

I begrudge no one their hobbies, their collections, their fetishes. But the Ballhawk belongs in the Ring of Hell that includes drivers that stay in the passing lane WHEN THEY ARE ONLY GOING THE SPEED LIMIT, parents who babytalk in public, fat guys who write diet books (Dr. Phil), the rock group Bread ("Baby, I'm-A Want you"), mindless whistlers and, well, insurance salesmen.

See, as I said, I am a baseball fan. I go to a lot of games. And it's cool getting a ball. I've gotten balls and missed some. But I think there's a protocol to be followed. It's okay, more than okay I confess, to go early, stand in the left-field bleachers, and, wearing a glove, try and catch batting practice home runs. I've done that, although the glove is mostly ornamental and prophylactic. I try to stand apart and give myself some room *if a ball comes in my general area*. It is here where I meet my natural enemy: the Ballhawk. Assholes like Zack Hample. See, for the Ballhawk, it is insufficient to try and catch a ball hit in what is called their general vicinity. Ballhawks are typically guys in their 20s and 30s. They are taller and more athletic than me. Not having been around when the Kennedys were assassinated, they have no historical context to fall back on and, hence, no scruples. The Ballhawks in Pittsburgh, at PNC Park, where the Pirates unconvincingly ply their trade, are locals, other Pirates' fans. But in their ridiculous backpacks, where they will safeguard their treasure, they have a change of clothes. They always wear a shirt and ballcap for *the visiting team*. So they wear their Hunter Pence t-shirt and Phillies cap and beg the cross-state rivals for balls. Or...they run 30, 40 feet, over seats and aisles and young children to catch one more ball, a ball perhaps that was heading for some young fan, or even an old guy with a glove, too cool to run himself. When BP is over, the Ballhawks go change into Pirates' gear. Some fans. The obvious fact that these guys probably have horrible sex lives is really of little comfort to me. So, I hate you Zack Hample, and all your ballhawking scum lot.

Bath Book Shop says

Raise your hand if you've ever been sucked in by a cover. C'mon now, admit it.

Well, the cover on this one is fantastic - a bit dramatic, very direct, and with a nudge that says "imagine the stories this baseball could tell".

At which point, I was a goner.

The book failed to live up to the cover, as happens so often in these cases. The first two parts, dealing with the history and production (modern and otherwise) of the baseball - the actual, hold-it-in-your-hands baseball, rather than the sport - were interesting, and written with a nice sense of humor.

Then Zack Hample took a hundred or so pages to remind everyone what the real purpose of baseball (the sport) apparently is: that he has caught more major league baseballs than you.

So, my recommendation: if you are a fan of history, baseball, or baseball history, read the first 200 pages. Then put it down and save yourself the trouble.

Perry Gibbs says

I read "The baseball" by Zach Hample. Since I have been playing baseball for as long as I can think of, It was a great read for me. Zach provided expert insight to areas of the game that I never would have thought to read about and he told exciting stories about catching home runs, foul balls and even general shenanigans that happened on the field. I gave the book 4 stars because in order for someone to enjoy the book, they would have to know a lot about baseball beforehand, which isn't something that everyone would have. The pictures provided in the book also made reading easier. Seeing some things is easier than describing them sometimes and Zach took advantage of this. I would recommend this book to any die-hard baseball fan or maybe someone that wants to learn a little more about the game than they already knew. This was a quality read and I would read it again. The book had 339 pages and I'm putting it under the "GOOOOOAL! " space.

Mike Smith says

I wouldn't call this a great book, but I did thoroughly enjoy reading it. I would have enjoyed it even more if more of the information presented had been new to me. The author's style is fairly encyclopedic regarding the baseball itself before transitioning to a basic technical style to instruct the reader in ball-hawking. The book is well researched so there is a lot of fascinating trivia. Unfortunately the book lacked any literary appeal for me. I don't intend this to be overly harsh as I am glad I read the book, but it does little to romanticize the baseball. Instead it depends on the reader's pre-existing enthrallment with the minutiae of baseball. That said, as a collector of baseballs, I am one such reader; so it was a perfect gift for me!

Jeff says

This is a great book to read while waiting for Opening Day to arrive. It's just the sort of book that can whet the appetite for the baseball season to begin.

Zack Hample is a master ballhawk. A ballhawk, by definition, is someone who is an expert at chasing down baseballs at major league baseball games (and even some spring training games). In *The Baseball*, Hample gives us a great look at that little white ball that we all obsess so much over. This is not a book about baseball, the game. This is a book about *THE baseball*.

Part One gives us a glimpse of baseballs in the news, from the souvenir craze to people who have actually been killed either by baseballs, or in the chase for them. (Fortunately, that last chapter is relatively small.) There are World Series balls, Barry Bonds home runs, Hank Aaron home runs, Sammy Sosa home runs, foul balls, various stunts by players and others, and even a chapter on "Foul Balls in Pop Culture." Unfortunately, there is a picture of Justin Bieber in that chapter.

Part Two gives us some history, with a great chapter on the evolution of the baseball, from 1847 to 2011. The interesting thing about that chapter is that there have always been controversies about the hotness of the ball, with allegations that the ball is juiced in some eras. The ball manufacturers swear that the ball has been made the same for a long time, now, with no specific changes that would make the ball hotter or less so. There is a great chapter on Rawlings and how the ball is made, followed by one about how they are stored and prepared for games, including a part about the infamous "Lena Blackburne Rubbing Mud." Yes, for those who are not aware, mud is rubbed onto the surface of every single baseball used in MLB play. But not just any mud. It is *secret* mud, from a secret location, somewhere in New Jersey.

Finally, in Part Three, Mr. Hamble gives us some tips on how to snag baseballs, from the master, himself. There are tips about various ballparks, along with some etiquette, what to do, what not to do, what you can get away with, how to talk to the players to convince them to give you a ball, and so on. He lists his favorite ballparks for getting balls (and our local Rangers Ballpark is one of his top ten). He gives a rundown of the top 10 ballhawks that he knows about.

Bottom line is that this is just a fun book about the baseball. I learned a lot, as I read it, and I was entertained by it, as well. Hamble's writing style is fun, even when describing the lengthy history of the baseball and its evolution.

I recommend this book for any true fan of the game.
