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Sporting a good book

Baseball Saved Us. When I read the title of this picture book, I was intrigued. Written by Ken Mochizuki and illustrated by Dom Lee, the story (for ages 4 to 10) is set in a Japanese internment camp in 1942 and features a Japanese American boy's experience as baseball becomes a catalyst for a better life. Nicknamed "Shorty," the boy is the kind of kid picked last for any team. Part history lesson, part sports story, this book is a "must read" for any child who has ever been at the plate and heard "easy out!" shouted from the stands.

Softball saved us. That's not the title of a book but perhaps only a slight exaggeration of how I feel. Three years ago, my daughter was fortunate to be taken under the wing of a heaven-sent softball coach named Ken and a gaggle of girls who have stayed together through shutouts and stolen bases, wins and losses. I have witnessed my timid child metamorphose into a softball phenom (okay—a mother's assessment). In the process, her sense of self has solidified.

My daughter doesn't get her sports prowess from me. When, as a child, I was up to bat, the other team would yell, "Move in!" Today I'm a wimp of a different sort. I become teary eyed at the slightest provocation. So when I picked up a copy of the book and CD set *And the Crowd Goes Wild* by Joe Garner, I needed Kleenex the size of a football field. This set features 47 of the greatest sports moments of the 20th century, starting in 1932 with Babe Ruth and ending with the 1999 women's World Cup Soccer win. Along with four pages of narrative and photos for each event, the actual replay of each moment is on CD. Although *And the Crowd Goes Wild* isn't located in the children's section, it can be enjoyed by ages 8 and older.

A new parenting book, *The Eight Seasons of Parenthood*, classifies the season I'm in now as "Parent as a Travel Agent." My life consists of transporting children in smelly uniforms. I don't mind, as long as we are dealing with one sport at a time. Last month, however, I felt like I

was part of one of those awful television specials: "When hockey and baseball seasons collide." It wasn't pretty.

When I discovered *This Is Baseball* (ages 4 to 8), I had to snap it up. What I found was a great introduction by Margaret Blackstone to America's favorite pastime. The text is simple—"This is a pitcher," "These are fans"—and John O'Brien's illustrations of roundish players

rich with stories of human triumph. Kathleen Krull shines the light on American heroine Wilma Rudolph in *Wilma Unlimited: How Wilma Rudolph Became the World's Fastest Woman* (ages 4 to 10). Rudolph overcame polio, racism and poverty to become the first American woman to win three gold medals in a single Olympics. Illustrator David Diaz's long lines make the figures move swiftly across the page.

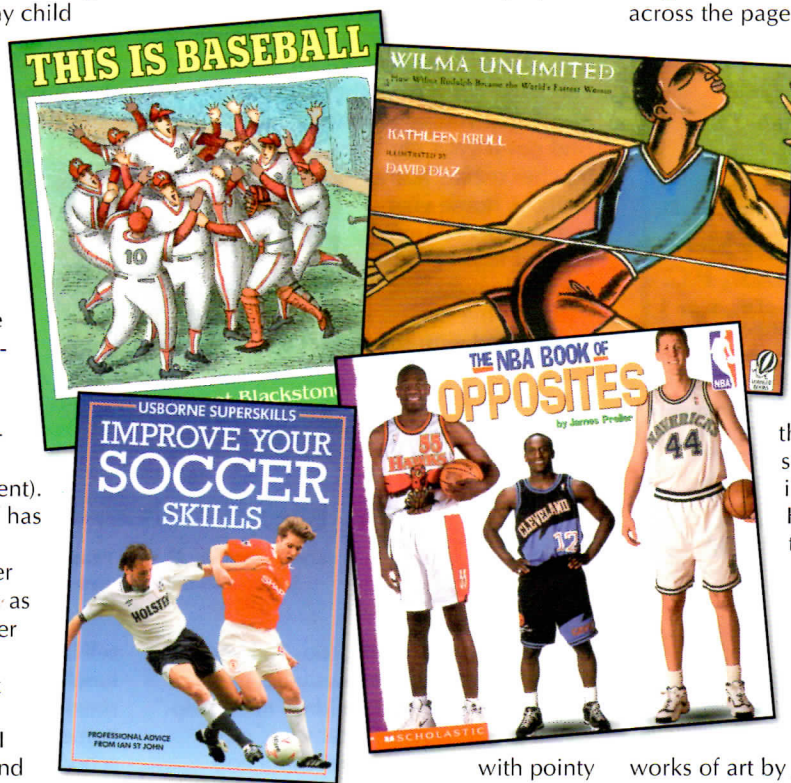
Krull tackles a crew of athletes in *Lives of the Athletes: Thrills, Spills, and What the Neighbors Thought* (ages 8 and up). This book presents biographies of athletes from Jesse Owens to surfer Duke Kahanamoku, Sir Edmund Hillary to Arthur Ashe. Krull does a great job of looking at the human and humorous side of these athletes and illustrator Kathryn Hewitt's caricatures contribute to the light tone.

Not really a biography, Eloise Greenfield brings us *For the Love of the Game: Michael Jordan and Me* (ages 4 to 10). This poetic approach to sports, accompanied by

works of art by Jan Spivey Gilchrist, encourages readers to listen to their hearts and spirits. Greenfield's words ("He forgets to obey the law of gravity") bring the reader to a deeper understanding of the wonders of sports.

On a more concrete level, *The NBA Book of Opposites* (ages 2 to 6) by James Preller presents photos of real NBA players illustrating opposing concepts. The "talk" and "listen" page shows a conrte player being chewed out by a much shorter ump. Other pages show opposites such as "hairy and bald" and "quiet and loud." Each page lists the players' or teams' names.

Practice, practice and more practice helps kids keep their heads in the game. Good sports books help kids keep their hearts in the game, which is, after all, why kids play sports.



with pointy chins are charming. This look at a day in the life of baseball starts with "The Star-Spangled Banner" and ends with crowds milling out under a sign that reads "Game Tomorrow 1 p.m."

Advanced young soccer players will seize upon *Improve Your Soccer Skills* by Paula Woods. This user-friendly manual takes individual skills and provides pictures and how-to tips for the motivated player over age 6. *Improve Your Soccer Skills* contains a forward by soccer player Ian St. John, whose name I would probably recognize if I had time to follow any athletes more than five feet tall. But I'm sure discriminating readers will be impressed.

Like it or not, sports figures are, dare I say, role models. Fortunately, the field is