



**Jim Leeke.** *Nine Innings for the King: The Day Wartime London Stopped for Baseball, July 4, 1918.* Jefferson: McFarland, 2015. 216 pp. \$19.99 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7864-7870-5.

**Reviewed by** Leslie Heaphy (KSU at Stark)

**Published on** H-War (February, 2019)

**Commissioned by** Margaret Sankey (Air War College)

## Nine Innings during a War

Jim Leeke offers an account of a game during World War I that has never before been written about in complete detail. In addition to talking about the game itself, Leeke places the game in the larger context of both the war and the Anglo-American Baseball League of the period. Readers are given a chance to learn about the background of baseball during World War I as well as the key figures involved on and off the field, such as Arlie Latham. Latham and Newton Crane helped orchestrate the events that eventually led to King George V attending a baseball game in Chelsea during the Great War.

Leeke's latest book builds off his previous work, both in his blog and then a book published in 2013, *Ballplayers in the Great War*. What the author found in this new story was a bit of a mystery, a baseball game between the army and the navy played on July 4, 1918. The mystery was the lack of reporting on the game after it was over. The *Stars and Stripes* magazine announced the king would be attending the game but never followed up with any accounts of what happened. The story had to be tracked down from a variety of other primary sources. Leeke uses a wide range of newspapers, Hall of Fame files, and other institutional records to build the story of the importance of not just this particular game but baseball in general. Leeke argues that baseball helped cement the positive relationship between the Brits and the Americans.

Leeke begins by setting the context for the game. His prologue provides an introduction to the attitudes of the

time as well as some of the key players such as Ed Lafitte and Mike McNally, both players with Major League experience. It also sets the tone for book with lucid prose, good research, and lots of details.

Each of the chapters that follow leads the reader to the final three chapters where we finally get to walk through the nine innings of a well-played game. The final result was Navy 2, Army 1 but the score was only part of the story. King George V and Queen Mary, along with a whole entourage of royalty, were treated to an almost rare baseball experience. Herb Pennock threw a two-hitter, while walking three but striking out fourteen to lead Navy. Even more impressive was the no-hitter Pennock took into the bottom of the ninth inning before Army mounted a final threat, coming up short in the end. Leeke's discussion of the game makes it clear that most Brits in the audience enjoyed the game, the atmosphere, and the cheering, but had no real idea about what they were seeing. They did not understand that they were witnessing a historic event with the possible no-hitter. What they did understand was the joy and camaraderie of the game. The thousands of fans present witnessed a historic game on many levels.

The King's game, as it came to be known, was a part of a much larger wartime baseball scene. In addition to the Anglo-American league there were other, smaller leagues in England. The English version of the game owed much to the creation of the National Base-

ball League of Great Britain, founded by Newton Crane in 1889. Though the league only lasted one season, Crane did not lose hope of seeing baseball flourish on British soil. The king even attended a game between the Chicago White Sox and New York Giants in 1914.

There was a much more extensive network of play in France, where American and Canadian soldiers and sailors were present in larger numbers. At one time there were at least thirty teams playing in the American Expeditionary Force League (p. 77). Christy Mathewson was even invited to come over and help promote and organize the games supported by the YMCA. With help from folks like Latham, Crane, Mathewson, and Johnny Evers, baseball was played everywhere American soldiers were found.

One of the strengths of Leeke's book is apparent from the first pages of the text. Leeke creates an enjoyable read with prose that holds the reader's interest even as

he imparts lots of facts and details. After reading this book, one feels like they were present in 1918 and got to see and experience the drama and excitement around the game played at Stamford Bridge. The other strength of the book is research done by the author. Leeke has extensively searched out all accounts of the game and the people involved to paint a full picture of this international baseball episode. While the focus appears from the title to be on one game, what is provided is a much wider examination of wartime international baseball. That is the real contribution of this book to baseball literature.

Any lover of baseball history will learn something from this book. For some it might be about the game itself, and for others it might be about the major and minor league players who entered the war and played baseball overseas. Herb Pennock and Eddie Lafitte were only two of the many hundreds who served their country, through baseball and the military.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-war>

**Citation:** Leslie Heaphy. Review of Leeke, Jim, *Nine Innings for the King: The Day Wartime London Stopped for Baseball, July 4, 1918*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. February, 2019.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=53322>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.