

# Fan edits 'ultimate' book about America's 'glue'

By CRAIG PIECHURA

Forgive Harry Okrent, Southfield attorney, if he overdoes the proud parent routine in the months to come. All that fatherly gushing is the result of son Daniel Okrent, 31, becoming co-editor of a literate, lavishly illustrated book brazenly called "The Ultimate Baseball Book." Okrent also has become president of an independent book production firm.

Okrent, who now lives in Worthington, Mass., wrote the introduction to the 352-page book and the captions next to 600 black-and-white and 200 color photographs, while co-editor Harris Lewine supervised the artwork. Published on Sept. 24 by Houghton Mifflin, the book has drawn raves from critics such as Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, book reviewer for the "New York Times," who called it "a wonderful potpourri composed of a long historical text, a collection of first-class essays and enough illustrations of players, teams, bubble-gum cards and other memorabilia to stuff the attics of the Hall of Fame."

The author's father is giving out selected copies of his son's 7.5 lb., \$30 "coffee table" book as presents to a few friends who appreciate baseball. But the senior Okrent says his wife Giella is one person who can't understand the hubbub. "My wife doesn't understand the book," Okrent said. "She doesn't understand how anyone could be that wrapped up in the sport. But then she doesn't know a baseball from a bat."

Harry Okrent says his son was "always a bigger baseball man than I ever was," with the father preferring to follow University of Michigan basketball and football. Dan admits as much, saying while some people count sheep to fall asleep, "I count infielders in the early '50s."

But author Okrent says like many old-timers, his dad's eyes mist up when he sees pictures of faded glory guys such as Tris Speaker in the book. And "the shared experience" of the nation's pastime is what "The Ultimate Baseball Book" is all about, says its author. "BASEBALL IS our great cultural glue," says Dan Okrent, "because of the nature of the shared experience. I remember when I was in a Maine resort hotel on my honeymoon. The Red Sox were on TV, like they usually are, and there were two people in the lobby watching the game. There was an 80-year-old man and an 8-year-old kid, and they were arguing over Dwight Evan's merit as a rightfielder. Is there another topic those two could've discussed intelligently?":

"The owners feel they own the game. They don't. Fans own the game."

—Harry Okrent



In researching the book, Okrent said he was impressed with the "seamless history of baseball" and decided to "cover the entire waterfront of the sport." Considering the number of books written about baseball annually, Okrent was asked if it wasn't a little bit presumptuous to call his the "ultimate."

The editor said that while it may sound egotistical, his book is "incomparable." He says it provides historical statistics, standings and commentary but, primarily gives readers "capital W" writing, writing with style to it.

Instead of hiring old sportswriters to crank out "the same old stories and baseball clichés," Okrent says two Pulitzer Prize winners — Red Smith and Tom Wicker — were among the writers commissioned to do original pieces appearing in the book. Other heavyweights writing for the book include Robert Creamer, senior editor of Sports Illustrated magazine, Esquire's Roy Blount Jr. and John Leonard, culture correspondent for the New York Times.

"Nowhere in the description of anybody does the phrase 'all-time great' appear," Okrent says proudly. "Nor will you find 'saint circuit' and the usual tried-and-true phrases that often pass for sportswriting."

BEFORE BECOMING the boy wonder of the New York publishing world, Okrent tried his hand at sportswriting one summer in 1968 at the Farmington Observer newspaper, now part of the Observer & Eccentric Newspaper chain.

Okrent says one summer behind the reporter's notebook convinced him that his future was in fiction.

"I was too embarrassed to ask people embarrassing questions so I ended up making things up," is Okrent's assessment of his brief career in community journalism.

The day after graduating from U-M in 1968, Okrent headed for New York where he immediately landed a job as editor at Alfred A. Knopf book publishers. In 1974 he was named editorial di-

rector at Grossman Publishers and, at the age of 29 was named the youngest editor-in-chief over at Harcourt, Brace, Jananovich, Inc. Okrent founded his own book packaging and production firm in 1978.

During his nine-year stay in New York Okrent, resisted pressure to change his allegiance and root for the Yankees.

"I have only two passions in the sport," Okrent says. "I love the Tigers and hate the Yankees. . . In '77 I went to 32 games at Yankee Stadium and rooted for the opposing team every time. The Yankees won 30 of the 32 games, thanks to me. I've felt very guilty about that ever since."

For "reasons of inheritance," Okrent lists Tiger Stadium as his favorite ballpark, with Chicago's Wrigley Field and Boston's Fenway Park in second and third place with newcomer Arlington, Tex. stadium ranking fourth.

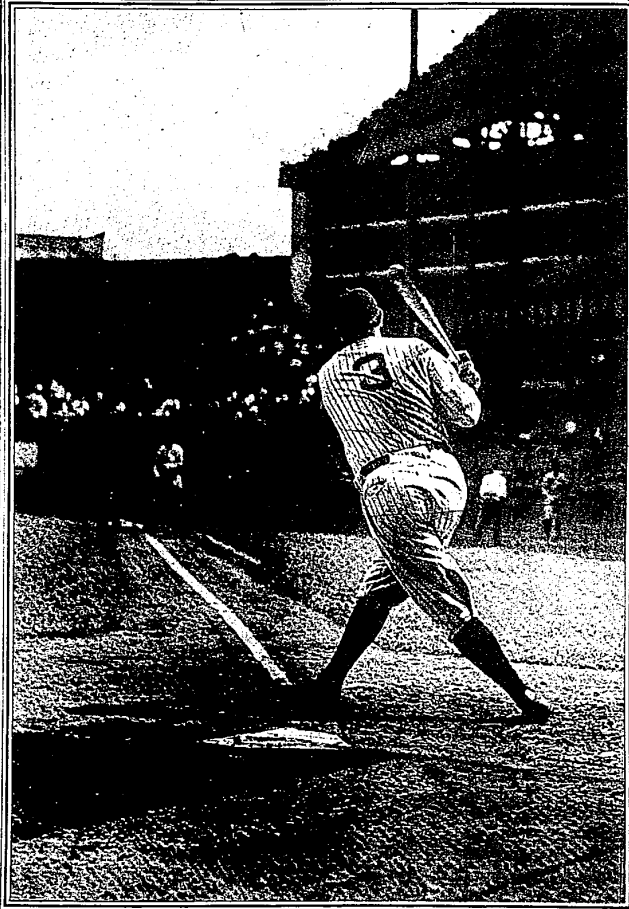
Okrent's favorite ballpark? Another local name — Willie Horton, now playing for the Seattle Mariners.

"He was so damn strong that he checked his swing in '65 and a piece of the bat flew off toward the mound," Okrent said of Horton. "To me this is a lot more impressive than a home run that hits the light standard."

Despite the high price tag of the book, Okrent said as a fan, he wants the book enjoyed by fans, not experts and certainly not owners of baseball clubs.

"The owners feel they own the game," Okrent says angrily. "They don't. Fans own the game."

Okrent entertains dreams of buying the Tiger team and promises to hire free agents if he sells enough books.



The mighty Babe Ruth takes a swing. (Photo courtesy: Culver Pictures)

## THE INSIDE \* ANGLE

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

**FIRST THERE WERE** services which would match prospective roommates. Then came dating services. Now, there's an animal placement service to match prospective master and pet so the two can walk off blissfully, hand in paw. (It's the stuff greeting cards are made of.) It's easy to join. No video recordings to make. No computer forms to fill out. No one will ask what sign you prefer to associate with. The service is sponsored by Pets 'n' Particulars of 22830 Mooney, Farmington. It's open to those who need to find another home for their pet or are looking for a new pet. The store will keep a file with your name, phone number and a general description of the pet you want or are willing to part with. Information will be kept on file for one month. There isn't a charge for the service. The store is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday.

Brown Drugs, Rosen Vision Clinic, Westbrook Cleaners, both Farmington Community Public Libraries, Godmar Rexall Drugs and Detroit Bank and Trust on 12 Mile and Orchard Lake Road.

**ANGLES NOTICES** that this edition of IA will hit the streets on Oct. 4. That's 10-4 Day — a date observed as a holiday by all Broderick Crawford fans. Reminis IA of Farmington City Council meeting a few years back in which then Mayor John Richardson tried to cajole the others into voting for measures by saying 10-4 instead of yea. Our Vet failed in the attempt. (Evidently the other members weren't big Broderick fans.) Well a big Highway Patrol 10-4 and over and out to all of IA's fans who are CB aficionados.

**LOCK UP YOUR** batteries. There's a nefarious battery thief taking the necessary implement from cars in Farmington. So far about five victims have acknowledged being battery-less. But this thief is picky. He usually takes batteries from 1959-70 Chevy Nova's. Farmington PDers are speculating that the thief is building an electric car. "That's why he needs all the batteries," said a smug Cop Shopper. IA figures if the thief was really after being the first in his or her neighborhood to build an electric car, there will be a run on extension cords next.

**TRAVELERS AROUND** our state can take in the Village Bach Festival in Cass City, Mich. This year's orgy of fugue and counterpoint will be conducted Nov. 23-25 in the Thumb area town.

Performances will take place in the Presbyterian Church in town which houses a Henry Erban Tracker organ circa 1865. Lectures on Bach's church music will be included in the three-day program.

**FOR THE STAY AT** home crowd, there's Helen Hayes on Channel 56 at 10 p.m., Oct. 9. Ms. Hayes will narrate a program exploring the effects of forced retirement on older persons. The program will look at the record of several employers who don't have mandatory retirement policies and it profiles a number of older workers like the 105-year-old man who holds a full-time job in a Chicago grocery store. The suicide rate among persons over 65 is the highest of any American age group. Retirees typically earn 40 per cent of the income they had while working, according to the program's research.

**MUSIC AT THE MARQUIS**, a series of performances in the Northville movie theater, will present Flavio Darani at 3 p.m., Oct. 14. Darani will appear in a piano recital featuring works by Chopin. Darani is artist in residence at Oakland University in Rochester. In the next year he will appear with Oakway Symphony, West Bloomfield Symphony, Scandinavian Symphony and the Detroit Symphony at Meadowbrook. Tickets are \$4; \$2 for senior citizens and students.

**GIFTED STUDENTS:** Oct. 8-15 is your week. Gov. William Milliken hath proclaimed so. In keeping with the occasion which honors the above average student, there will be special workshops on logical thinking produced by Sharon Higham, a teacher at Warner Junior High School. In addition to Ms. Higham's project, the parents of gifted students will meet in North Farmington High School Oct. 18 to discuss ways of helping their youngsters.

**FOCUS ON Living with Cancer** will meet at 7:30 p.m., Oct. 11 in Orchard United Methodist Church, 30450 Farmington Road in Farmington. The self-help group aims at aiding patients and family members cope with the disease. For additional information, call the American Cancer Society, 537-5353.

**OLD GLASSES** can get new owners through the Lions Club. During the week of Oct. 8-13, the Farmington Area Lions Club will be collecting used eyeglasses. Lenses from the collected glasses will be used to correct the vision of the underprivileged in 131 countries served by the Lions. Collection spots for old glasses include the National Bank of Detroit on Farmington Road and Alta Loma,

## See Rosenthal's Porcelain Fine Art Collection... Unique showing and selling at Hudson's Oakland

For one week only, now through October 10, you are invited to view this most unusual gathering of treasures from Rosenthal's 100th anniversary collection. Starting with the stunning Relief Series of sculpture, a major new direction in the art of fine porcelain, and continuing through limited editions of dinnerware art commissioned from internationally acclaimed artists. This is a rare journey into the fine art of living. But, more than this, once you've enjoyed the view, you're welcome to make these beautiful art forms part of your own life. See the exciting exhibit in its entirety, Third Level at Hudson's Oakland only. Relief Series and Limited Editions subject to prior sale.



October special: 20% off Rosenthal's Studio-Linio dinnerware patterns. Choose from a wide variety of gracious patterns in dinnerware created by renowned designers. 5-pc. place settings and serving pieces. All at 20% off, but some by special order only. Please allow two weeks delivery on certain in-stock patterns. Hudson's Fine China, Northland, Eastland, Oakland, Ann Arbor and at Twelve Oaks.

hudson's