

The pages are loaded

Elliott Lefko

The Year the Expos Almost Won the Pennant! by Brodie Snyder, illustrated by Aislin, Virgo Press, 1979, 232 pp., \$12.50.

A Baseball Classic by Merritt Clifton, SAMISDAT, 1978, 95 pp., \$2.50.

Requiem for Reggie, by Earl McRae, Chimo Publishing, 1977, 149 pp., 99¢

The sports novel is back! Merritt Clifton, a resident of tiny Brigham, Quebec, has written the sports cult find of the year: **A Baseball Classic**. Two other books, Earl McRae's **Requiem for Reggie**, and Brodie Snyder's **The Year the Expos Almost Won the Pennant!** are also recent winners.

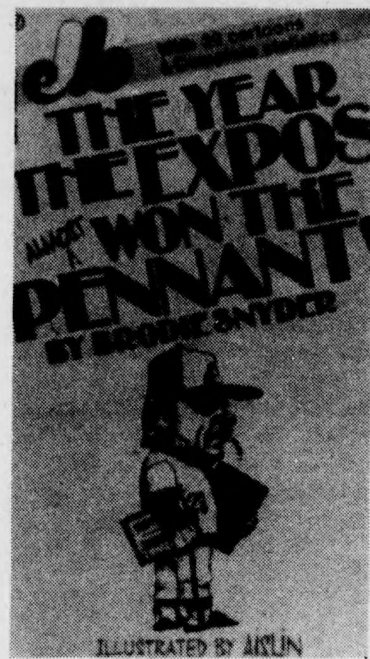
Clifton's book is a homespun novel put together by the cheeky SAMISDAT, a Vermont mail-order printing company. The paper and string binding are refreshingly simple, placing the emphasis on the hard-hitting, typewritten words inside. **A Baseball Classic** is a narrative told

by one "Mac" McCarver, a young man in his mid-twenties whose life-long dream was to play professional ball, but whose batting average (ERA) never matched the numbers exerted by his heart.

"Mac" lives in a small town, working in a mill, playing industrial league baseball, maintaining his batting average, and reading the *Sporting News*, baseball's bible. As the thirty-year age barrier approaches, and he knows the major leagues are fading faster than a Koufax fastball, "Mac" begins to re-evaluate his life. Some of his logic is as telling as the scuff and bruises on a kid's only baseball. As one "Hermaphroditic demon" tells him: "You're a queer! Baseball's your excuse—an obsession, a fetish. Why don't you just wear pantyhose? Face it, Mac: bats are dick symbols!"

Earl McRae is a thirty-eight-year-old sports feature writer. You've probably read his pieces in the *Canadian Magazine*. They're hard to miss. About once

a month the man visits some old broken-down hockey player, a young upstart baseball pitcher, or a once-great sports legend, and comes back with the goods—



red hot, and spicy, just the way you like it. McRae approaches an assignment in an unusual manner. It's as if the man is a

witch doctor. He reaches into the soul of the interviewee and extracts the story, blood and all.

You may recognize some of the people he is writing about, and others you won't. But it doesn't matter. After reading a McRae story you don't forget. The pictures are timeless. About Reggie Fleming, a brutal hockey player, formerly of the NHL, now buried in the minors: "In the green reflection from the dashboard, Reggie Fleming's face is almost grotesque, the lumps and furrows from 18 seasons of violent warfare in pro hockey casting their own proud shadows."

The baseball season is only three months away, but it seems just a few days ago that the Montreal Expos were fighting it out with the Pittsburgh Pirates for a pennant. Montreal sports writer Brodie Snyder keeps the memory alive with a diary of last year's miracle season, **The Year the Expos Almost Won the Pennant!** The book, illustrated with 20 Aislin cartoons, is fashioned after that great sports

classic **The Year The Mets Lost Last Place**. I don't know if Snyder began the book as an idea in spring training, or if he has just gone back to the files in an attempt to cash in on the Expos' success. I believe it is the latter, for the book reads like yesterday's sports papers. There is little information to be gained outside of what you already know, if you did follow the race. The book is also full of typos. I'd suggest Virgo trade their proofreader.



Flaws aside, the book is still worth reading for the drawings of Aislin and the words of the Expos' "Spaceman," Bill Lee: "When I'm going down the street and see someone throw a piece of paper out of a car window, I write down the license number. Someday I'm going to write a book."

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