

ROBERT LIPSYTE

Bouton and Gallo Head the List Of Gift Books

Two of the keenest observers of sport in my time have produced gift-sized books for the holidays, leading my list of ways you should spend money to support writers.

The original "Ball Four" was published 30 years ago, and at the time I thought it was a valentine to The Pastime and that baseball's hostile reaction (particularly among officials and journalists) was a sly way to make the book an all-time best seller. Or maybe the critics were jealous that it took a player, a 20-game-winning pitcher at that, to give us real insight into life with the Yankees, the Astros and the long-gone Seattle Pilots.

Time has only sweetened Jim Bouton's smart and funny tales of Mickey Mantle and Steve Hovley. ("Religion is like baseball," said Steve, "great game, bad owners.") Three updates, 10 years apart, enhance "Ball Four: The Final Pitch" (Sports Publishing Inc., \$24.95) and bring the Bulldog to the settling that comes with grandfatherhood at 61; the death of his daughter, Laurie, in a traffic accident; and George Steinbrenner's invitation — in response to an article by Bouton's son Michael in The Times — to an old-timers' game at Yankee Stadium.

But Bouton has not lost the quirky flutter of his knuckleball. In fact, he may have also regained the zip on his fastball. Standing up for the current generation, he writes: "Players today are like thoroughbred horses. We were farm animals."

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In support of those who put pen to the page.