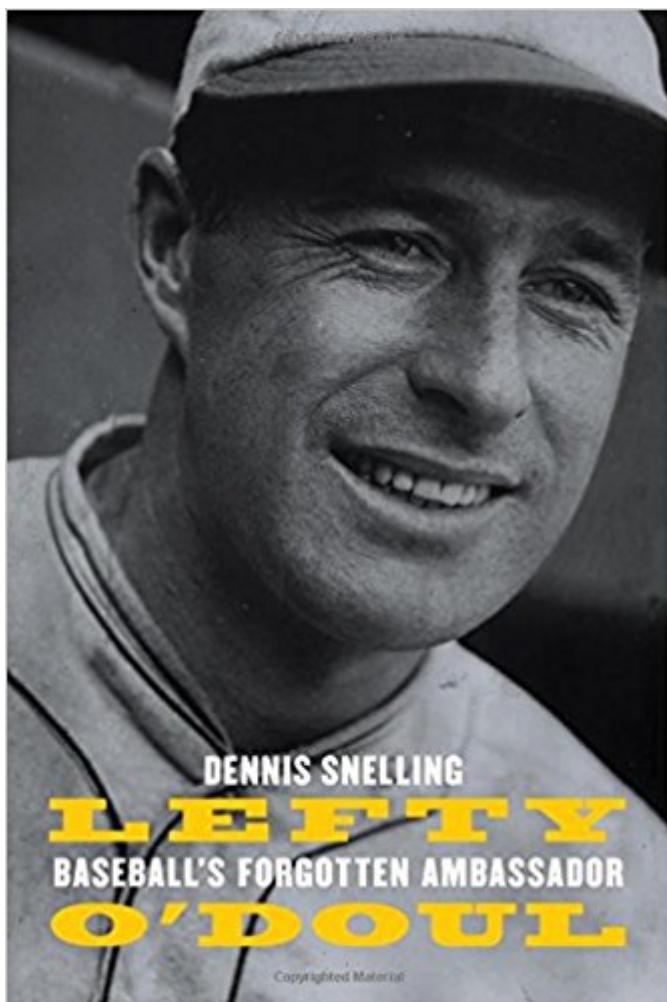


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Lefty O'Doul: Baseball's Forgotten Ambassador



Synopsis

From San Francisco to the Ginza in Tokyo, Lefty O'Doul relates the untold story of one of baseball's greatest hitters, most colorful characters, and the unofficial father of professional baseball in Japan. Lefty O'Doul (1897–1969) began his career on the sandlots of San Francisco and was drafted by the Yankees as a pitcher. Although an arm injury and his refusal to give up the mound clouded his first four years, he converted into an outfielder. After four Minor League seasons he returned to the Major Leagues to become one of the game's most prolific power hitters, retiring with the fourth-highest lifetime batting average in Major League history. A self-taught "scientific" hitter, O'Doul then became the game's preeminent hitting instructor, counting Joe DiMaggio and Ted Williams as his top disciples. In 1931 O'Doul traveled to Japan with an All-Star team and later convinced Babe Ruth to headline a 1934 tour. By helping to establish the professional game in Japan, he paved the way for Hideo Nomo, Ichiro Suzuki, and Hideki Matsui to play in the American Major Leagues. O'Doul's finest moment came in 1949, when General Douglas MacArthur asked him to bring a baseball team to Japan, a tour that MacArthur later praised as one of the greatest diplomatic efforts in U.S. history. O'Doul became one of the most successful managers in the Pacific Coast League and was instrumental in spreading baseball's growth and popularity in Japan. He is still beloved in Japan, where in 2002 he was inducted into the Japanese Baseball Hall of Fame.

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Customer Reviews

"A superb biography...one of the best baseball books of the year..."--Allen Barra, San Francisco Chronicle" Dennis Snelling's compelling biography "Lefty O'Doul" tells of the pitcher who, after a sore arm, became one of baseball's greatest hitters and hitting coaches before helping to establish the game in Japan." - The New York Times" While O'Doul may be more underappreciated than forgotten, this superb biography will go a long way towards rectifying the slight... Snelling's "Lefty O'Doul" is a well-deserved and rewarding account of a very well-lived life." - Spitball Magazine "Despite (a) towering legacy, O'Doul is largely overlooked these days. Which helps make Lefty O'Doul: Baseball's Forgotten Ambassador so riveting. [An] engrossing, scrupulously researched new biography to remind--or enlighten--fans about the outsized role O'Doul played in the history of the game."--Paul Hagen, MLB.com "Perhaps the most important twentieth-century figure not enshrined in Cooperstown, Lefty O'Doul influenced the game on both sides of the Pacific. . . . Dennis Snelling brings Lefty to life in this well-written and fascinating biography. Lefty O'Doul should be on the must-read list of all serious baseball fans. A true Sayonara home run!"--Robert K. Fitts, author of *Banzai Babe Ruth, winner of the Seymour Medal*" The life of Lefty O'Doul was filled with joy, enthusiasm, and accomplishment, and no one has told his story better than Dennis Snelling. This wonderful book fully describes the many facets of Lefty's personality."--Dick Beverage, secretary-treasurer for the Association of Professional Ballplayers of America and president of the Pacific Coast League Historical Society" The untold and incredible true story about the man many believe to be the most important figure not enshrined in Cooperstown. An excellent portrait of a thoughtful and generous man with a scientific approach to hitting and an unbridled passion for the game; an athlete, a pioneer, a diplomat, a teacher--and one of baseball's forgotten greats." Ft. Myers Southwest Florida Magazine" Dennis Snelling has written the definitive biography of one of baseball's greatest personalities. It's a book worthy of its subject."--Jeremy Lehrman, Plate Coverage "Longtime baseball writer Snelling traces the whole of O'Doul's career, revealing a character whose passion for the game and its players make him one of the most valued players in baseball history." - Brooklyn Daily Eagle" Snelling takes the reader back to how O'Doul was not only San Francisco's favorite son, but also one of the most important figures in international baseball. O'Doul was a drawing card as a player, minor-league manager, and bridge builder. And Snelling... explains it in full. What may be "forgotten," and the book title doesn't want hidden, is O'Doul's connection to Japanese baseball, as a hitting coach and instructor, before and after World War II. None of that is forgotten here, thankfully. If that's

enough to get O' Doul inducted in Cooperstown as a contributor to the game, that could stand on its own merits, thanks to Snelling's efforts." -Tom Hoffarth, Los Angeles

Daily News "The Man in the Green Suit may not have a plaque in Cooperstown, but Snelling's richly detailed, well-written biography offers compelling evidence that O' Doul's contributions to the game should be taken into consideration." Bob D' Angelo -- The Sports Bookie Blog "Engrossing, scrupulously-researched." • Paul Hagen, MLB.com (Paul Hagen MLB.com 2017-05-05) "One of the best baseball books of the year." • Allen Barra, San Francisco Chronicle (Allen Barra San Francisco Chronicle 2017-05-17) "Dennis Snelling makes the reader fall in love with the larger than life character that was Lefty O'Doul." • Melissa Minners, g-pop.net (Melissa Minners g-pop.net) "Perhaps the most important twentieth-century figure not enshrined in Cooperstown, Lefty O'Doul influenced the game on both sides of the Pacific. . . . Dennis Snelling brings Lefty to life in this well-written and fascinating biography. Lefty O'Doul should be on the must-read list of all serious baseball fans. A true Sayonara home run!" • Robert K. Fitts, author of Banzai Babe Ruth, winner of the Seymour Medal (Robert K. Fitts 2016-09-07) "The life of Lefty O'Doul was filled with joy, enthusiasm, and accomplishment, and no one has told his story better than Dennis Snelling. This wonderful book fully describes the many facets of Lefty's personality." • Dick Beverage, secretary-treasurer for the Association of Professional Ballplayers of America and president of the Pacific Coast League Historical Society (Dick Beverage 2016-09-07)

Dennis Snelling has been a senior writer for Helmar Baseball History and Art magazine and a member of the Society for American Baseball Research and the Pacific Coast League Historical Society. He is the author of The Greatest Minor League: A History of the Pacific Coast League, 1903-1957 and Johnny Evers: A Baseball Life.

Not enough about his personal life but covers his baseball career well

Dennis Snelling, author of Johnny Evers: A Baseball Life, has hit another homerun with his enjoyable study of Frank "Lefty" O'Doul. This work is grounded in contemporary newspapers, interviews of family and those who knew Lefty, secondary literature, and most impressive, archival sources, ranging from the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown to university libraries and the National Archives in

Washington, D.C. Snelling is a talented writer, telling an interesting story with sharp, crisp prose. O'Brien was his own worst enemy. He was a talented picture until he hurt his arm, and no longer had major league ability. He was also a gifted hitter, both for average and power, but for several years refused to give up pitching for the outfield. Moreover, his carefree attitude appeared to demonstrate his lack of seriousness about the game. As Snelling convincingly shows, this perception was wrong; O'Brien was a fierce competitor who hated to lose. His last break came in 1928, at age 31, with the New York Giants, and he made the most of it. Platooning in the outfield, he hit .319. Traded to the Philadelphia Phillies, 1929 was O'Brien's breakout year, leading the league in hitting with .398 (one hit shy of .400); he also had 32 HRs and 122 RBIs. He is the only player to hit more than 30 homeruns and strikeout less than 20 times. O'Brien repeated as National League batting champion in 1932 with the Brooklyn Robins. While a dynamic hitter, he only had four seasons with 500 at-bats or more because of his age. There are several interesting things about Lefty. First, he was one of the first "scientific hitters." He constantly studied pictures and adjusted his stance at the plate accordingly. He also studied slow-motion films of himself hitting. Taught by Ty Cobb how to hit to left field (O'Brien was a left-hand hitter.), O'Brien showed a willingness to help others. He became one of the first hitting instructors in professional baseball, working with such future stars as Joe DiMaggio, Ted Williams (He told Ted to never let anyone change his swing.), Dom DiMaggio, Gene Woodling, and Gary Cooper, star of The Pride of the Yankees. He also helped Ryan Duren gain some control over his fastball. Second, Lefty loved kids; he never had children of his own. He carried bats, balls, and gloves in the trunk of his car and freely handed them out to kids he saw playing ball. He sponsored several youth league teams, and when he returned to San Francisco to manage the Seals of the Pacific Coast League (PCL) in the mid-1930s, he turned the annual "Lefty O'Brien Day" into a kids day at the ballpark with autographed balls and miniature bats. Third, he was an accomplished manager. He is only one of ten managers in professional baseball with 2,000 plus wins, and only one of two to do it exclusively in the minor leagues. From 1943 to 1945, he won the PCL four-team play-off with less talent than the other participants. O'Brien was also a showman as a manager. He initiated the tactic of waving a handkerchief at the opposing picture to distract him, a gesture taken up by the San Francisco fans. For a couple of years, both he and Casey Stengel managed against each other in the PCL, which must have provided great entertainment for the fans and some memorable quotes. Lastly, O'Brien has been called the father of Japanese professional

baseball and an ambassador of reconciliation between the people of Japan and America in the aftermath of World War II. Hence the book's subtitle, *Baseball's Forgotten Ambassador*. Lefty made several trips to Japan in the 1930s, was instrumental in getting Babe Ruth to travel there in 1934, and encouraged Japanese sports officials to create a professional baseball league. His most memorable trip was in 1949 when he accompanied the San Francisco Seals, a trip that helped raise the morale of the Japanese people, a trip sanctioned and praised by General Douglas MacArthur, the head of the Allied Occupation Forces. Snelling points out that there have been several efforts to get O'Doul elected to the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, all of which have failed. His career was too short to justify his inclusion as a player. However, if one adds in his managing success, his impact as a hitting coach, and his influence on the game in Japan, there is a case for his election. Only time will tell. However, in 2002, he was inducted into the Japanese Baseball Hall of Fame, an honor that would have warmly touched Lefty, who died in 1969.

Francis O'Doul can be considered a rarity in baseball while he was an outstanding major league player, retiring with the fourth-highest career batting average in history, it was his work in the minor leagues and in Japan where he truly made a difference in the game. The story of his life in and out of baseball is told in this biography by Dennis Snelling. O'Doul was raised in the Butchertown section of San Francisco, a tough neighborhood which got its name from the proliferation of butchers and slaughterhouses in the area. O'Doul was destined to follow his father into that business until he was encouraged to use his athletic gifts by his teacher Rose Stolz. It was uncommon for women to be coaching sports at that time in the early 20th century, but she was his coach and O'Doul gave her credit for teaching him the game and mentoring him early in his athletic career. His career started with the San Francisco Seals of the Pacific Coast League, which at (PCL) the time was considered close to the equal of the Major Leagues and the highest level of baseball played west of the Mississippi. O'Doul was playing the outfield and pitching, eventually gaining a spot on the New York Yankees, but not succeeding in either position. He set a record during that brief time that still has not been broken: he gave up 13 runs in one inning, the most allowed by a single pitcher in one inning. He was convinced to give up pitching during another stint with the Seals, and this time it proved to be better when he played for the New York Giants, becoming a prolific hitter including a season in which he hit .398 in 1929. However, despite this success, where O'Doul

left his mark in the game was with his coaching and managing, which he did for a few decades for the Seals and San Diego in the PCL. One of his prize pupils was Joe DiMaggio, who gives O'Doul much credit for his success. They stayed friends long after both of their careers were over. The book's format has each chapter start with an excerpt describing O'Doul's biggest accomplishment, and that was the 1949 series of exhibition games between a team of Major League all-stars and Japanese teams played in Japan. This exhibition was notable for several reasons — the countries still had some bitter feelings so soon after World War II, the American players were treated like royalty by the Japanese fans, and General Douglas MacArthur even attended games.

O'Doul worked tirelessly to promote the game in Japan, having made several trips there and was in attendance when Masanori Murakami became the first Japanese player to play in the Major Leagues in 1964. Given the variances in topics in which to write about O'Doul, I felt that Mr. Snelling did a very good job of piecing all of these aspects of the career of O'Doul and wrote a book that is not only easy to follow with all of these pieces, but is also informative enough that the reader will finish it believing that he or she knows a lot about O'Doul. That was the case for me as I had not known much about the man's career and certainly not that he was a true ambassador for the game in Japan. After reading this book, I believe that Lefty

O'Doul's story is one that anyone interested in the game's history, whether in the United States or in Japan, is one that should be read. I wish to thank University of Nebraska Press for providing a copy of the book via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

As a fan of the PCL's "Golden Age," (as well as having a web site about the SF Seals), I thought I knew a lot about Lefty. I was wrong. I learned so much more about Lefty in this book than I ever knew before, thanks to Dennis Snelling. He has provided an excellent in-depth bio about one of baseball's overlooked heroes. I agree with Tom O'Doul that Lefty should be in the Hall of Fame. Perhaps it's because of Lefty's stubbornness to give up pitching and be a full-time outfielder early on that people don't know much about him. Or that his two National League batting titles were with lousy teams. He still shares the National League record for hits in a season, just missing out on hitting .400 that year. Or that most of his managers thought he was too "carefree" to be a major league outfielder. Perhaps it's because he chose to stay in San Francisco managing the Seals than to accept a major league managerial job. Maybe it's because of his determination to make pro

baseball in Japan a reality (plus his many tours with major leaguers to that country). Lefty is only one of three Americans in the Japanese baseball Hall of Fame. He was a huge ambassador for the game in Japan and when Gen. Douglas MacArthur complements you on your act of diplomacy as he did after Lefty's 1949 tour of Japan, clearly you did something right. I'm glad that Snelling is keeping the memory of O'Doul alive for a new generation of baseball fans everywhere. This is a book every baseball fan should read.

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