Kornhauser, Jacob. The Cup of Coffee Club: 11 Players and Their Brush with Baseball History.

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Reviewed by Mark D. Noe

While Little League is meant to teach lots of lessons, the one that perhaps hurts the most is the one that tells a kid, “You’ll never play in the big leagues.” That may be a rude awakening to some; others may labor on in spite of it, hope springing eternal and all that. It often becomes a question of whether that disillusioned Little Leaguer feels more admiration or envy toward those who actually reach the majors. Jacob Kornhauser’s stories of eleven ballplayers (actually, more than that, with a few particularly touching cases added in a final chapter) who made the bigs but played in just a single game tends to temper any tendency toward envy.

The eleven case studies range from 1958 (Charlie Lindstrom) to 2008 (Matt Tupman). Some names could have led to baseball dynasties (Lindstrom, Larry Yount, Stephen Larkin). Others remained in the dugout but with a different perspective (Rafael Montalvo and Jeff Banister in coaching and managing roles). Some used the knowledge gained through professional careers to make a living related to the game (Lindstrom and ballpark lighting, Jon Ratliff and orthopedic implants, Sam Marsonek and his baseball ministry oriented especially toward Latin American kids). But they all played in just one game.

Any collection of stories like this will fascinate the typical baseball fan, who (if I’m any example) must sit with Baseball Reference open on the laptop while reading. Each case study includes an interview, bringing the player into the narrative, providing a firsthand account. The reasons these players fail to get into a second game vary, ranging from timing to injury to manager’s dislike to, frankly, self-inflicted stupidity. Results, too, vary, with most players ultimately accepting their cup-of-coffee status, though never getting over their wonder at what might have been.

*The Cup of Coffee Club* is an interesting take on a quirky sidelight of baseball history. For a fanatic, it’s a dish of candy worth dipping into. Though doing so doesn’t allay any of those Little Leaguer regrets.