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Review of *Willie Wells: "El Diablo" of the Negro Leagues*, By Bob Luke

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Willie Wells: "El Diablo" of the Negro Leagues. By Bob Luke. Foreword by Monte Irvin. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007. xvi + 192 pp. Tables, photographs, notes, sources, index. \$65.00 cloth, \$22.95 paper.

Bob Luke introduces readers to Willie Wells the man as well as Willie Wells the ball player. Wells's life is placed in the larger context of where he came from in Texas as well as what was happening in America during and after his baseball career ended. To tell his story Luke relies on primary sources as much as possible. Interviews and Wells's own letters are nicely woven throughout the text, giving readers an immediate feel for Wells as a person.

After presenting Wells the player and family man, Luke offers a discussion of the long road to the Hall of Fame, explaining the difficulty Wells and others from the Negro Leagues faced getting elected to the Hall. In fact six of the book's seventeen chapters are devoted to telling parts of that story, along with all its controversy. To some this may seem a bit out of balance, but it places Wells's story into a larger context both within the Negro Leagues and in America.

Luke makes a strong argument for Wells as one of the premier players in the Negro Leagues. He is generally placed in the same category as Dick Lundy and "Pop" Lloyd as the best shortstops in the game. Wells impressed all who saw and played with him whether in the Negro Leagues, on the West Coast, or in Latin America. He played regularly in the annual East-West classic beginning in 1933. Late in his career he also managed and taught others the discipline and love he had for the game.

He earned his nickname "El Diablo" for the way he played. He loved the game and gave it his all every time he stepped on the diamond, and he expected no less from his teammates and opponents. This aggressive spirit is captured effectively throughout the book. At times a reader might wish Luke offered more detail, or explored his stories in greater depth, but lack of available sources makes some of that impossible. Luke provides a good set of notes for those wishing to do more research on their own to learn about Wells or such teammates as John Miles, Mule Suttles, and Dizzy Dismukes.

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