



# Ellis Island to Ebbets Field: Sport and the American Jewish Experience

*Peter Levine*

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Jews have stereotypically been considered people of the book rather than people of the jump shot, right cross, or home run. Yet for many East European Jewish immigrants, and especially their children, participation in American sport during the first half of the twentieth century became an important part of their pursuit of the American dream and a pathway to assimilation. In *Ellis Island to Ebbets Field*, Peter Levine explores the importance of sport in transforming Jewish immigrants into American Jews. Drawing on interviews with celebrities as well as lesser known neighborhood stars, Levine vividly recounts the stories of Red Auerbach, Hank Greenberg, Moe Berg, Sid Luckman, Andy Cohen, Nat Holman, Benny Leonard, Barney Ross, Marty Glickman, Jammy Moskowitz, and many others who became Jewish heroes and symbols of the difficult struggle for American success. From settlement houses and street corners to Madison Square Garden and Fenway Park, their experiences illuminate a time when Jewish males dominated sports like boxing and basketball, helping to smash stereotypes about Jewish weakness while instilling American Jews with a fierce pride in their strength and ability in the face of Nazi aggression, domestic anti-Semitism, and economic depression. And Levine brings the story up to date with sure comparisons to the experiences of more contemporary Jewish athletes such as Sandy Koufax, SuperJew Mike Epstein, Mark Spitz, and Amy Alcott. Be it the stories of Jesse Owens's Olympic triumph at the expense of Marty Glickman's disappointment, the baseball heroics of Hank Greenberg and his status as preeminent Jewish hero, the incredible exploits of championship basketball teams like the Philadelphia SPHAs, the nimble football feet of the Jewish hillbilly, Marshall Goldberg, or the pummeling fists of Battling Levinsky, *Ellis Island to Ebbets Field* reveals a Jewish community full of conflict and hope, where sport--both watching it and playing it--served as a middle ground between minority and majority cultures, between ethnic and racial minorities, and between generations of people who were actively determining for themselves what it meant to be American Jews. Recreating that world through marvelous stories, anecdotes, and personalities, Levine enhances our understanding of the Jewish-American experience as well as the struggles of other American minority groups.

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