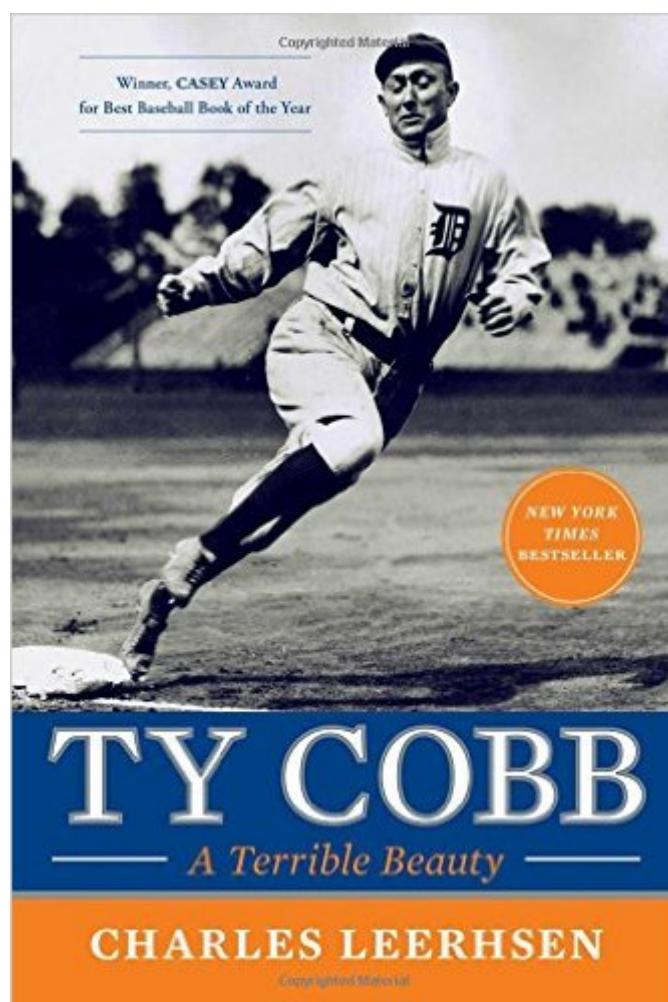


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# Ty Cobb: A Terrible Beauty



## Synopsis

A fascinating and authoritative biography of perhaps the most controversial player in baseball history, Ty Cobb "â œThe best work ever written on this American sports legend: Itâ™s a major reconsideration of a reputation unfairly maligned for decadesâ • (The Boston Globe). Ty Cobb is baseball royalty, maybe even the greatest player ever. His lifetime batting average is still the highest in history, and when he retired in 1928, after twenty-one years with the Detroit Tigers and two with the Philadelphia Athletics, he held more than ninety records. But the numbers donâ™t tell half of Cobbâ™s tale. The Georgia Peach was by far the most thrilling player of the era: When the Hall of Fame began in 1936, he was the first player voted in. But Cobb was also one of the gameâ™s most controversial characters. He got in a lot of fights, on and off the field, and was often accused of being overly aggressive. Even his supporters acknowledged that he was a fierce competitor, but he was also widely admired. After his death in 1961, however, his reputation morphed into that of a virulent racist who also hated children and women, and was in turn hated by his peers. How did this happen? Who is the real Ty Cobb? Setting the record straight, Charles Leerhsen pushed aside the myths, traveled to Georgia and Detroit, and re-traced Cobbâ™s journey from the shy son of a professor and state senator who was progressive on race for his time to Americaâ™s first true sports celebrity. The result is a "œnoble [and] convincing" • (The New York Times Book Review) biography that is "œgroundbreaking, thorough, and compelling" [The most complete, well-researched, and thorough treatment that has ever been written" • (The Tampa Tribune).

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Like many students of baseball history, I had always admired Cobb the player but believed Cobb

the person much less admirable. I assumed he was simply a man of his time and place who could not overcome being born in the Deep South during segregation nor perhaps a natural inclination towards misanthropy. Charles Leerhsen's *Ty Cobb: A Terrible Beauty* has convinced that nearly everything I knew about Cobb was wrong. Largely thanks to scholarship that emerged only at the very end of Cobb's life (and interestingly, at odds with evidence from much earlier periods) his reputation is that of a miserable, friendless, racist lout. When his name is invoked today, it's usually to denounce the hypocrisy of the Hall of Fame's so-called "character clause" (if the Hall really cared about character, they'd kick Cobb out). Yet as Leerhsen notes this flies in the face of the simple fact that Cobb was not only in the very first Hall of Fame class, but received more votes than any other player including Babe Ruth, belying the notion that he was disliked by his contemporaries. African-Americans who personally knew him were quoted as saying they not only liked him, but loved him. So, where did the myth begin and why does it continue? An important part of *A Terrible Beauty* is helping us to understand how baseball has gotten a vital part of its own story so wrong. Time and time again, Leerhsen peels back numerous myths and subjects them to painstaking scrutiny. He accepts nothing at face value. His judicious use of evidence leaves us a much better understanding of this complicated man who was the best player of baseball in its purest form.

Ty Cobb's reputation had been destroyed over the years by people who wanted a villain in baseball and by one person in particular (Al Stump) who made the better part of his career off ruining Cobb's reputation. The low point in all of it was Ron Shelton's film "Cobb" (based on Stump's input) where Cobb was portrayed as a rapist, alcoholic, a murderer and drug addict who casually shot off guns in nightclubs without consequence when he wasn't being racist or fixing baseball games. Stump's reputation was destroyed a few years ago by revelations that he created large quantities of fake Cobb items and forged documents when he sold to collectors. That somewhat set the stage for a reappraisal of Cobb's life going back to solid primary sources. Leerhsen's book is a very welcome corrective. He does what was necessary. He throws out all the assumptions and beliefs about Cobb. He looks at what we actually know of his life from solid sources and he compares his findings to the stories of previous authors. He shows a far more complicated Cobb. Cobb didn't play baseball as a game. He saw two competitions in every "game". The team is trying to beat the other team but at the same time, every player on a team is in competition within the team for their "spot" or their position. He was a man who went all out in whatever he did and he didn't have any romantic notions about sports. And yet the private Cobb outside of business and the "game" was often a generous man and

a responsible man in terms of obligations. Its somewhat outside of modern expectations that the private life and business/public life of an individual can be so different. And yet that is Cobb. Leerhsen demolishes nearly all of the old stories that made Cobb into a racist fanatic.

We now have had two recent biographies of Ty Cobb. Tim Hornbaker wrote the recent book entitled "War on the Basepaths: The Definitive Biography of Ty Cobb." We now have "Ty Cobb: A Terrible Beauty " by Charles Leerhsen. Both books give Cobb a fair shake in regard to his reputation. I believe Leerhsen's book "A Terrible Beauty" does a more thorough job in redefining Cobb's reputation. He debunks Al Stump and others who have written about Cobb without backing up their sources. While it's true that Cobb did have a hair-trigger temper which is noted in several places it is possible that he expected others to live up to the standards he set for himself. Cobb began his career with the Tigers as a teenager having recently dealt with the death of his father at the hand of his mother, living hundreds of miles from home, and being treated in a most vile manner by his teammates. This would be a heavy burden for anyone to deal with. Baseball in the early years of the 20th century left a lot to be desired. Players had fist fights with umpires while players who may not get along with a teammate who is pitching may not put out their best effort in an attempt to make the pitcher look bad. Author Leerhsen mentions a number of "bad" biographies of Ty Cobb that have been written and backs it up with the reasons he feels that way. He doesn't mention Tim Hornbaker's self-proclaimed "Definitive Biography" but I'm sure that is due to its not having been published yet. So which is better? "War on the Basepaths: The Definitive Biography of Ty Cobb" or Charles Leerhsen's new book entitled "Ty Cobb: A Terrible Beauty"?

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