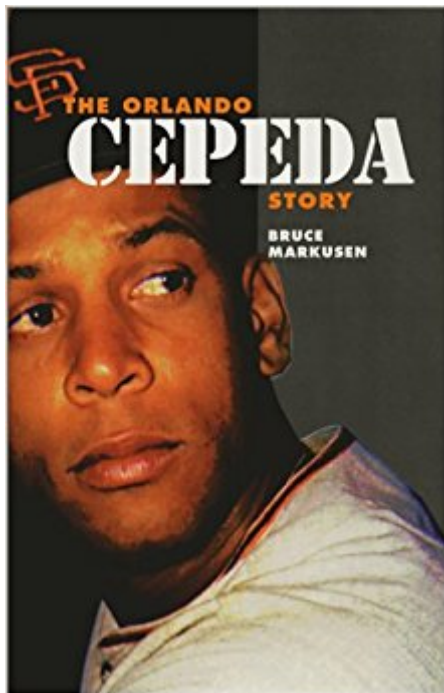


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The Orlando Cepeda Story



Synopsis

Tracing Orlando Cha Cha Cepeda's rise to fame, his plummet to prison, and his recovery and election to the Hall of Fame, Markusen offers a compelling portrait of a player fighting to be a real hit on the pages of baseball history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"The bittersweet tale of the slugging Giants and Cardinals first baseman, whose brilliant career became tainted by a series of legal problems that kept him out of the Hall of Fame for years." "The story is fast-paced and fascinating." "This easy-to-read biography ... should appeal to sports fans and might provide food for thought for young readers." "This easy-to-read biography...Should appeal to sports fans and might provide food for thought for young readers."

This is a short book, easily readable in 3 hours or less due to its brevity. But, its a solid work. Markusen does a fine job in detailing Cepeda's life and career as the son of a Puerto Rican baseball legend and then as a superstar baseball player. I was especially interested to read about the issues he had with some of his managers (especially Al Dark) and also his post-career troubles with the law.

Great history on a Hall of Fame Player

Bruce Markusen wrote one of the best baseball books ever in 2009, "The Team That Changed

Baseball: Roberto Clemente and the 1971 Pittsburgh Pirates". I read it when it was published and read it again recently to refresh my memory of that historic team and was glad I did so. Markusen earned my trust with that book so I was disappointed in some careless writing that causes me to give this one four stars instead of five. Markusen's credentials with the Baseball Hall of Fame make it even more puzzling that he has four significant errors of fact in "The Orlando Cepeda Story". Let's get them out of the way first. The errors are: 1. When Cepeda began his career with Salem, VA, in the Appalachian League, he was denied service at a restaurant "during a road trip to Iowa." I can't imagine any Appy League team making a trip to Iowa since its membership has always consisted of towns in the Southern Appalachians with the exception of Burlington in the North Carolina Piedmont. 2. The author mentioned the group of established stars with the San Francisco Giants when Cepeda joined the team in 1958. He included Juan Marichal in the group although the records show Marichal did not make his big league debut until 1960. 3. Markusen discusses the Giants' first visit to New York to play the Mets in 1962 and says they played at Shea Stadium. The Mets, as any baseball fan knows, played their first two years at the Polo Grounds and did not move to Shea until 1964. 4. The Atlanta Braves met the Mets for the National League pennant in the first playoff series when divisional play began in 1969. It was a best-of-three series at that time, not a best-of-five as is stated in the book. Putting the errors aside, Markusen does a splendid job of describing Cepeda's life from his humble beginnings to his plaque at Cooperstown. The book is brief and very readable. It describes Cepeda's career on the field very well and deals with his problems off the field with federal law enforcement. One cannot help but admire Cepeda for his willingness to own up to his responsibility for the rough road he travelled at that time. One suspects that was a very big plus the Veteran's Committee considered when voting him into the Hall of Fame. I had the pleasure of seeing Cepeda play several games with the Santurce Crabbers in the 1961-62 Puerto Rican Winter League. I admired his habit of coming into the stands in full uniform before games to chat with people he knew. He came across as a very approachable man who already shared the spotlight with Clemente as the two top players from the Island. Bill White's recent book, "Uppity", sent me on a search for other books about the Giants and their African-American and Hispanic stars. That's how I came across this one a decade after it was published. I'll give anything Markusen writes a try but I hope he won't hesitate to do a bit of verifying with all the baseball record books at his disposal!

Orlando Cepeda was a revolutionary player. He was San Francisco's first homegrown star after the Giants arrived in California in 1958--the great Willie Mays was considered a holdover from the franchise's days in New York. "The Baby Bull," so nicknamed because he was the son of great

Puerto Rican slugger Pedro "The Bull" Cepeda, was a tremendous run producer in a time when those players were rare. And in Mays and Willie McCovey the Giants had three of the National League's best. With Juan Marichal as the team's ace, it's amazing that San Francisco won only one pennant. Their inability to win wasn't Cepeda's fault--after leaving the Giants he helped the Cardinals and Braves reach the postseason three straight years--but Cepeda's biggest mistakes happened away from the field. Beloved by his teammates, Cepeda had problems with his knees and his managers, which together led to five uniform changes in his final eight years in the major leagues. He also had difficulties with his marriage and the IRS, but his lowest point came after his career ended when he served time in prison for trafficking marijuana. In a book aimed at young adults these things are not simple to address or explain, but Bruce Markusen does both very well. It's not just a book about a baseball player, it's a story about a man of flawed character who swallows his sizeable pride and proves to be greater in defeat than he was in victory. Disgraced in his home country and not entirely welcomed in America, Cepeda started his life anew in plain sight of those who thought of him as a criminal who had thrown away fame, wealth, and respect. He made it back to the major leagues as a coach, but didn't last long in any place. Fittingly, the turnaround came in San Francisco, and the author does a wonderful job of recreating the scene. You can almost see a packed Candlestick Park and hear the roar of the crowd when he throws out the first pitch during the 1987 playoffs. He admits that it was not until that moment that he realized that people cared and accepted him, flaws and all. That is perhaps the book's most valuable lesson--Cepeda paid for his mistakes, admitted he was wrong, and worked to get back the people's trust. While the ultimate reward for most people won't be the Hall of Fame or the cheers of thousands, it is a fitting prize for someone who has fallen on his face while the world watched and judged. Cepeda has been covered in at least four other biographies--including three autobiographies--but Markusen's version is a no nonsense approach that tells a story well for a young audience that can benefit from the lessons Cepeda learned the hard way. I have read Markusen's other two books on this era of baseball history--The Great One and Baseball's Last Dynasty, which deal with Roberto Celente and the 1970s Oakland A's, respectively--and I would safely call this another success.

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