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# Baseball and Basketball Fiction for Young Adults

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# Baseball and Basketball Fiction for Young Adults

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#### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to decide if the current examples of baseball and basketball novels for young adults have a high degree of accuracy. Content analysis was used to determine this accuracy. Description, rules and techniques characteristics and problems and concerns characteristics were developed and listed on a checklist. Fifteen novels on baseball and basketball were read and analyzed using the checklist. All hypotheses were accepted. The fifteen novels all had a majority of "yes" checks in both descriptions, rules and in techniques and problems and concerns categories. Thus, modern baseball and basketball sports novels do seem to have a high degree of accuracy.

# BASEBALL AND BASKETBALL FICTION FOR YOUNG ADULTS

A Graduate Research Paper
Submitted to the
Division of Library Science
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by Virgil Pixler July 12, 1994

#### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to decide if the current examples of baseball and basketball novels for young adults have a high degree of accuracy. Content analysis was used to determine this accuracy. Description, rules and techniques characteristics and problems and concerns characteristics were developed and listed on a checklist. Fifteen novels on baseball and basketball were read and analyzed using the checklist. All hypotheses were accepted. The fifteen novels all had a majority of "yes" checks in both descriptions, rules and in techniques and problems and concerns categories. Thus, modern baseball and basketball sports novels do seem to have a high degree of accuracy.

This Research Paper by: Virgil Pixler

Titled: BASEBALL AND BASKETBALL FICTION FOR YOUNG ADULTS

has been approved as meeting the research requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

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# Chapter 1

#### Introduction

One of the objectives of a media specialist is to encourage young adults to read. When these same students were in elementary school, especially the lower elementary grades, they seemed to be excited about reading and usually read all the time. They would at least check out what was allowable, read these books and come back the next library time. As students become older they sometime have other interests: sports, girls, television and jobs. Students still read, but are more selective. If they are going to read a novel, it probably should be better than television.

Sports novels are usually of high interest.

Students compete in sports formally or informally and watch many games on television. To maintain interest, the novels must be believable or realistic because these young adults know the rules and correct techniques. They may have found themselves in some of the same circumstances as characters in noveis. They know the concerns of students when trying to make a team and to keep a position. If sports novels are to keep young adults reading, they must be accurate. The

novel must have a good storyline, but if students think it is phony and would never happen in real life, they will be less likely to recommend the book to others or to read a similar book again. If the novel is interesting and follows game and participation rules, students may be impressed and interested and will continue to read.

### Significance of Study

It is significant to find out if novers on baseball and basketball are accurately portraying the respective sports. The researcher found no study that dealt with an analysis of realistic content of sports fiction. There were histories of sports novels but no study to determine if the novels are meeting realistic standards. Interest exists for sports novels and, if that interest is reinforced by accurate accounts, baseball and basketball novels will help meet a need for encouraging young adults to read. If the books that the researcher has read and analyzed meet the accuracy criteria, there will be at least one selected list of fiction books on baseball and basketball for young adults to read that meet standards of accuracy.

#### Problem Statement and Hypotheses

The purpose of this study was to determine if the current examples of baseball and basketball novels for

young adults have a high degree of accuracy. Specific problem statements answered were:

- 1. Are the descriptions, rules or techniques and the problems or concerns of participation in the sport or baseball presented accurately in young adult fiction?
- 2. Are the descriptions, rules, or techniques and the problems or concerns of participation in the sport of basketball presented accurately in young adult fiction?

Hypotheses tested were:

- 1. A majority of the young adult fiction books about baseball will have a majority of accurate descriptions, rules, and techniques of baseball.
- 2. A majority of the young adult fiction books about baseball will have a majority of accurate descriptions of the problems and concerns of baseball players.
- 3. A majority of the young adult fiction books about basketball will have a majority of accurate descriptions, rules, and techniques of basketball.
- 4. A majority of the young adult fiction books about basketball will have a majority of accurate descriptions of the problems and concerns of basketball players.

#### Definitions

 Young adult fiction is defined as novels intended for readers in the sixth to twelfth grades.

- 2. Baseball novels are those which have paseball as a major focus, not just characters visiting the ballpark or attending the World Series.
- 3. Basketball novels are those which have basketball as a major focus, not just characters visiting the gym or attending the NBA play-offs.
- 4. Baseball and basketball teams in the novels could be at the junior high, high school, college or professional sports level.

#### Assumptions and Limitations

There were some basic assumptions in this study. It was assumed that accuracy of techniques, rules, problems, and concerns related to baseball and basketball in young adult fiction is important and that adolescents are still somewhat interested in reading about these popular sports. It was also assumed that there would be books of sufficient quality and quantity that would make this a useful study. Another assumption was that the researcher could recognize accurate and inaccurate descriptions in the novels.

The researcher limited the novels to those published since 1980. The older novels are still read to some extent, but sports books can be dated quickly. In baseball and basketball novels references are made to current sports heroes, and if those players are gone

and forgotten the young reader might lose interest in the novel. Rules in sports change over a period of time. If a novel is dated, the reader might notice that the rules are wrong. Teenage problems and concerns were those related to participation in the sports; general social problems and concerns were not considered in this study.

The study was limited to books with main characters who are male. The study was limited to books found in the Cedar Falls (Iowa) Public Library or the UNI Donald O. Rod Library Youth Collection. The books were fiction and for readers in the sixth through twelfth grades. The subject was either baseball or basketball. All books in the above mentioned libraries with these characteristics were read.

## Chapter 2

#### The Literature Review

Young adult fiction on sports such as baseball and basketball have a history of about one hundred years. This history, the literature of criticism about sports today, surveys on what students are interested in reading, and literature that encourages the reading of sports novels to increase the enjoyment of reading in general were reviewed.

Beginning around 1890, young boys started to go to school longer because the government started enforcing child labor laws. "Before this time most young adult novels were for girls because they were in school. School sports stories are the first true novels for adolescent boys" (Jackson, 1986, p. 1887). About this time organized sports became very common in colleges and at the professional level. Thus, there were events to write about and an audience of boys in school to read them. In early sports novels the team came first. Loyalty to the team and school were all-important. Honesty and fair play were more important than winning the game. Determination won the game; the hero looked like a hero and the villain looked like a villain.

specimens" (p. 193). The books were easy to read, and events and characters were believable (p. 195).

The dime novel was the leading version of early baseball fiction. Writers such as Burt Standish achieved a wide audience; however, stories had "stock characterization, stilted dialogue, improbable situations and heavy moralizing that lessen their value" (Graber, 1969, p. 1109). Ralph Henry wrote one hundred and fifty books that dealt with baseball. "His dialogue is more natural, his plots fresher, his portrayal of characters more important in the outcome of the action" (Gruber, 1969, p. 1110). "He sincerely believed that sports presented opportunities and challenges for every boy" (Donelson, 1989, p. 522). These two writers advanced the scope of boys' books with their school sports stories.

During the next fifty years (1931-1980) authors wrote books that concentrated on the hero, not just on team spirit. The hero had to learn about himself. He usually matured during the novel and made decisions based on his conscience. The idea was that big sports were getting tainted and the hero had to make the right personal decision. There was usually a final scene where the hero won the game for the team. "The emphasis was on the individual hero's learning something about himself, leaving behind some childisn

behavior" (Jackson, 1986, p. 290). John Tunis dominated this era with his baseball books that had the hero make the right choice which led to a team win.

"He appealed to young people's innate sense of justice" (Sheriekis, 1977, p. 642). Not everyone liked Tunis, for example Robert Unsworth (1978) wrote, "his books must have been corny even in the old days" (p.38). But at least "fiction for boys had been liberated from the idealization, banter and horseplay of the juvenile stories" (Graber, 1967, p. 1112). Tunis still has some popularity because some of his books are being reissued.

## Young Adult Baseball and Basketball Books Today

"Today sports fiction is an examination of the price of fame, the worth of the game and the temptation to make temporary glory permanent" (Donelson, 1989, p. 228). The game is still played and the action is still important, but there is more to the novel than just the game. The current baseball and basketball novel is a vehicle to solve or discuss a current adolescent problem. "Baseball provides the setting while the characters and their growth as human beings make up the real story" (Copeland, 1985, p. 86). "Baseball is an integral part of the story but not the story" (p. 86). Sports novels can deal with the various problems facing

today's youth as well as present the activities in the gym or on the diamond.

Basketball and baseball games are on television frequently, and salary disputes are discussed. Adolescents hear about the personal lives of players on television and read about them in the newspapers. know these players are not just players, but real people with real problems. They know about strikes, fights and gambling in baseball and basketball. Thev will not believe a sports novel if the world is perfect, without problems, and only the game is presented. The game is still presented but the hero deals with current problems with which young adults can identify, or at least, with which they are familiar. "New sports fiction is more daring in form and content" (Brown, 1982, p. 29). "The sports involvement is used by the author as a metaphor of the story action" (Forman, 1987, p. 501). "Fiction with a sports background, editors agree, is likely to be the source of better books" (Calabro, 1980, p. 31).

There is more to the sports novel for the young adult today than the play-by-play books of yesteryear. Baseball and basketball novels can deal with current problems, but the realistic description of the game is still important for a good sports novel. "The descriptions of play-by-play action are essential for

filling YA's request for a good sports story" (Brown, 1982, p. 29). They watch games on television and want the thrill of a good game, the reason for choosing a sports novel instead of an adventure story. "Sports action is still an intrinsic part of the story but its function has changed from subject to motif" (Forman, 1987, p. 502).

# Interest in Sports Used to Encourage Reading

According to the 1982 San Francisco Bay Area Young Adult Librarians' Reading Interest Survey, sport books were still among the top ten (Goodhope, 1982, p.33). According to Ross and Simone (1982), 58% to 68% of tenth to twelfth grade boys prefer sports fiction (p.15).

Millions of people go to the ballparks and gyms to watch baseball and basketball. These sports are played by students of all ages on the playground or in an empty lot. "Boys respond well to sports and retain their interests in sports even in the eleventh and twelfth grades" (Reising, 1969, p. xxix). Sports are also of interest to girls. Girls play in more sports today and an interest in reading will follow. "Sports are a part of our culture, our lives" (Bachner, 1984, p. 313).

Baseball and basketball novels have a high interest level. This interest can be used to encourage students to read. "Students know about sports and will read about them" (Bachner, 1984, p. 313). We need books that students have an interest in reading. Students like sports but they want novels with which they can identify. They have problems and enjoy reading about them and identifying with the characters in the books. Students need to be encouraged to read. "Sports literature, a valuable but untapped resource can supply the motivation" (Bachner, 1984, p. 314). Sports and reading can provide young people with a content area that they enjoy and that may encourage their thinking skills (Gentile, 1980, p. 8).

#### Summary

Sports novels for young adults have been popular for a long time with young boys and remain popular today. Youth have changed as have the sports novels. Novels have to compete with television, computer games, and videos and must be of high interest. Contemporary sports fiction focuses on teens' problems, but still has the game as the background. Students will identify with these problems but the game must be realistic.

## Chapter 3

#### Methodology

Content analysis is defined as "a procedure designed to facilitate the objective analysis of the appearance of words, phrases, concepts, themes, characters, or even sentences and paragraphs contained in printed or audiovisual materials" (Busha and Harter, 1980, p. 171). After quantifying and ordering the categorized units, the researcher is able to analyze, compare and interpret the data. The problem of category construction is widely regarded as the most crucial aspect of content analysis. Content analysis is important as a research method to determine if what young people read is accurate in representing reailife.

The researcher read and analyzed each novel, investigating the elements related to the hypotheses. Using a checklist (see Appendix) created by the researcher, occurences or incidents of specific actions which illustrate accurate descriptions in baseball and basketball novels were checked.

The degree of realism was determined by how accurately the correct descriptions, techniques, and rules of baseball and basketball were followed. The degree of realism was also concerned with teenage

problems and concerns when playing baseball or basketball. It was determined whether these concerns were of a real nature or just a component for a good story.

Examples of realistic decriptions, rules, and techniques of baseball are correct number of innings, batting technique, pitching technique, flelding technique, correct terminology, correct time of year, correct post-season games, correct umpire interpretations, correct names of real major teams, correct names of real ballparks, correct substitution technique, and proper batting sequence.

Examples of realistic teenage problems and concerns when playing baseball include: making the first team; losing first team status; not getting the big hit; not making the big play; trying to impress a girlfriend; friends at school; parents or the coach; keeping grades up; getting old; opposing pitchers; teams, or fans; not being conceited; and keeping in shape. The skill of some pitchers can give batters a lot of concern. The reputation and ability of a good team and the nastiness of their fans can give a player a lot of concern.

Examples of descriptions, rules, and techniques of basketball are correct number of quarters, correct shooting and rebounding techniques, correct offensive and defensive plays, correct coaching decisions,

correct terminology, correct time of year, correct post-season games, correct names of real major teams, correct substitution technique, and correct referee decisions.

Examples of realistic descriptions of teenage problems and concerns when playing basketball are: making the first team; losing first team status; not making the big shot; not getting the big rebound; not making the big defensive play; trying to impress a girlfriend, friends at school, parents or the coach; keeping grades up; getting old; opposing team or fans; not being conceited and keeping in shape. The researcher recorded the major problem of each novel on the bottom of the checklist sheet.

The researcher compiled a list of fiction books to analyze by checking in library catalogs under "baseball" and "basketball." The suggested reading level had to be from 6th grade to 12th grade. The books were obtained from the Cedar Falls (Iowa) Public Library and the UNI Donald O. Rod Library Youth Collection. The researcher used these libraries because they have collections that are representative of the guidelines established for this study. The librarians in these libraries read reviews and buy only books that have good reviews in more than one professional journal. Between the two libraries a

broad range of young adult fiction books was available to conduct an adequate study. Only the books meeting the guidelines and limitations were used. A list of books in the study is Appendix B.

#### Chapter 4

# Analysis of Data

The researcher read and analyzed fifteen young adult novels about baseball and basketball. A checklist that listed descriptions, rules, and techniques and problems and concerns of basketball and baseball was used for each book. The researcher recorded "yes" or "no" when content related to one of the listed criteria occurred in the book. For all fifteen books there were 596 "yes" checks and 113 "no" checks.

The first hypothsis was "a majority of the young adult fiction books about baseball will have a majority of accurate descriptions, rules, and techniques of baseball." As can be seen from Table 1 all baseball books had a majority of "yes" tallies on rules, and techniques. There were 155 "yes" tallies and 15 "no" checks. The first hypothesis was accepted. An example of correct descriptions in this category was the name of the baseball team Kansas City Royals in the book, The Rookie Arrives. An example of incorrect descriptions was the name of the baseball team Providence Jewels in the book, Strike Three You're Dead. All other teams in this book had the proper name.

Table 1. Number of Checks for Accuracies and Inaccuracies in Baseball Books

		riptions	Problems	
Titles	Rules & Techniques		& Concerns	
	Yes	No	Yes_	No
Atami Dragons	21	3	l l 16	4
Jock & Jill	24	0	13	7
Original House of David	24	4	! ! 21	2
Out at Home	14	1	. 4	0
Rabbit Ears	21	4	1 23	10
The Rookie Arrives	23	0	20	7
Strike Three You're Dead	   28	3	,     20	3
Total	155	15	117	33

The second hypothesis stated that "a majority of the young adult fiction books about baseball will have a majority of accurate descriptions of the problems and concerns of baseball players." Data on Table I shows that all books had a majority of "yes" checks on problems and concerns of baseball players. The second hypothesis was accepted. An example of correct response to problems and concerns was in the book,

Rabbit Ears. Players on the other teams made fun of Tip's ears. Tip was 14 years old and the teasing about his ears bothered his concentration while pitching. An example of incorrect response to problems and concerns was in the book, The Rookie Arrives. A realistic

response would be for a new player to try to impress the coach but Ted could care less what he said and argued with the coach.

The third hypothesis stated that "a majority of the young adult fiction books about basketball will have a majority of accurate descriptions, rules, and

Table 2. Number of Checks for Accuracies & Inaccuracies in Basketball Books

Titles		riptions Techniques	Propiems & Concerns	
	ı I Yes	No	l Yes	ÌνΟ
Hoops	l ! 25	3	19	~
The Moves Make the Man	l 20 l	4	1 12	4
On the Devil's Court	1 1 27 1	3	1 21	2
Orp Goes to the Hoop	   19 	4	1 1 ½	4
Outside Shot	l l 12	4	1 12	11
Rebound Caper	l l 25	5	21	11
Taking Sides	ı ı 25	7	1 21	5
Tournament Upstart	1 1 30	0	16	4
Total	l l 183	30	   141	43

techniques of basketball." As can be seen from Table 2 all basketball books had a majority of yes checks on description, rules and techniques of basketball. The third hypothesis was accepted. An example of correct technique was when Roy stole the ball in mid-dripple

and threw a long pass to a teammate for a lay-up in the book, Tournament Upstart. An example of unrealistic description was the improper coaching decision to allow Gary to play on a girls' team. The coach had a good team; why take a chance of disrupting the team or even having the team disqualified in the games Gary would play.

The fourth hypothesis stated that "a majority of young adult fiction books about basketball will have a majority of accurate descriptions of the problems and concerns of basketball players." Data in Table 2 show that all basketball novels had a majority of yes checks on the problems and concerns of basketball players. The fourth hypothesis was accepted. An example of correct response to problems and concerns was in the book, On the Devil's Court. Joe is new at school. dad is a famous scientist and because Joe wants to impress people and make friends based on his own talents. Joe goes out for basketball. An example of Incorrect response to problems and concerns was in the book. Outside Shot. Lonnie is at college on a basketball scholarship. This is a great opportunity. His response to the opportunity is to become involved with gamblers, to ignore his studies, and to be unconcerned with his coach's opinion.

# Chapter 5

Conclusion, Recommendations, Summary

Based on the fifteen books that were analyzed it seems clear that modern baseball and basketball novels are accurate in their description of the two sports. The book <u>Outside Shot</u>, a sequel to <u>Hoops</u>, barely had majority of "yes" checks in the problems and concerns category. The character's off-the-court behavior was

less realistic than it was in Hoops. The actions on

the court were very descriptive and realistic. The

rest of the books had a greater majority of "yes"

checks that support all four hypotheses.

The researcher found that there were more "yes" checks and fewer "no" checks in the descriptions, rules, and technique category in both baseball and basketball novels. The authors were very knowledgeable about how the games are played. They were able to describe very graphically and correctly how to shoot and dribble a basketball. Their knowledge of baseball and basketball rules was almost flawless. They were able to describe very correctly how to swing a bat and hit a baseball.

The older baseball and basketball books were filled with this type of material, but in today's sports novel there is also a problem, usually personal, that

needs to be solved. There were more "no" checks than in the rules and technique category. There were some actions judged by the researcher as unrealistic. When not on the field or in the gym, the author's imagination has few boundaries, such as rules. Overall, most of the action was consistent and believeable. The authors are trying to involve their readers with these problems or concerns while still trying to tell a good sports story. The authors must feel that readers of sports novels are still somewhat purists when it comes to rules and techniques. They would be criticized by readers who want a good sports novel and would feel short-changed if the sport setting was not accurate. The researcher hopes this trend will continue. Readers need to be encouraged. If they are to have an interest in sports novels, each novel must be realistic enough to keep the interest high.

#### Recommendations

If this study were replicated, I would recommend that the reading level be changed from grades 6-12 to grades 8-12, and an additional study for grades 3-7 could be done. It would be interesting to see at which level the authors were more concerned about the correct descriptions, techniques, rules, problems, and concerns

in sports novels. Another recommendation is to use a different sports area such as football. There are many football novels and the accuracy of their characteristics needs to be examined. Of course, if football novels were to be studied, the descriptions, rules and techniques characteristics would need to be developed. Another recommendation would be to do a study about girls sports books with a female as the main character.

Results of this study could be applied by those purchasing novels for young adults. Sports novels of today are realistic and should encourage young people to read them and then come back for more. The authors of the novels read for this study should be given great consideration when purchasing novels for young adults. The list could also be used by young adults looking for a good sports story to read.

### Summary

The purpose of this study was to decide if the current examples of baseball and basketball novels for young adults have a high degree of accurracy.

A list of baseball and basketball novels was developed, and the books were read and analyzed. An analysis checklist, developed by the researcher, listed

rules, descriptions, techniques, problems and concerns for each sport.

Specific problem statements answered were

(a.) Are the descriptions, rules, or techniques and the problems or concerns of participation in the sport of baseball presented accurately in young adult fiction?,

(b.) Are the descriptions, rules or techniques and the problems or concerns of participation in the sport of basketball presented accurately in young adult fiction? The answers to both questions were yes.

The hypotheses tested were:

- 1. A majority of the young adult fiction books about baseball will have a majority of accurate descriptions, rules and techniques of baseball.
- 2. A majority of the young adult fiction books about baseball will have a majority of accurate description of the problems and concerns of baseball players.
- 3. A majority of the young adult fiction books about basketball will have a majority of accurate descriptions, rules and techniques of basketball.
- 4. A majority of the young adult fiction books about basketball will have a majority of accurate descriptions of the problems and concerns of basketball players. All four hypotheses were accepted.

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# Appendix A

# CHECKLISTS

# CRITERIA FOR THE ANALYSIS OF ACCURACY IN BASEBALL FICTION BOOKS

AUT	HOR	TITLE			
PUBI	LISHER	DATE	PAGES		
Were 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.	CRIPTIONS, RULES AND TECH the following correct? Length of game Batting Technique Pitching Technique Fielding Technique Terminology used Time of Year Post-season games	HNIQUES		Yes No Appli	cable
8. 9. 10. 11.	Correct umpire interpredictions Names of major teams Names of ballparks Substitution technique Proper batting sequence	tations			
	BLEMS/CONCERNS e consequences correct fe	or the f	ollowing prob	olems/concer	ns?
1. 2. 3. 4. 5.	Making first team Losing first team status Not getting the big hit Not making the big play Trying to impress a gir Trying to impress friend	lfriend	nool		
10. 11.	Trying to impress parent Trying to impress the con- Keeping grades up Getting old Opposing pitchers, teams	oach	ne fans		
	Not conceited Keeping in shape				

Major Problem of the Novel

# CRITERIA FOR THE ANALYSIS OF ACCURACY IN BASKETBALL FICTION BOOKS

AUTI	HOR	TITLE_		
PUBLISHER		DATE	PAGES	
	CRIPTIONS, RULES AND e the following corre		S	Yes No Not Applicable
3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8.	Number of quarters Shooting and rebound Offensive and defens Coaching decisions Terminology Time of Year Post-season games Names of major teams Substitution process Referee decisions	sive plays		
	BLEMS/CONCERNS e consequences corre	ct for the	following pro	oblems/concerns?
3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 11.	Making the first team so Losing first team so Not making the big of Not making the big of Not making the defer Trying to impress a Trying to impress for Trying to impress por Trying to impress the Keeping grades up Getting old Oppposing team or for Not conceited	tatus shot rebound nsive play girlfrien riends at arents he coach	d	
	Keeping in shape			-

Major Problem of the Novel

## Appendix B

#### Books Used

## Baseball Books

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