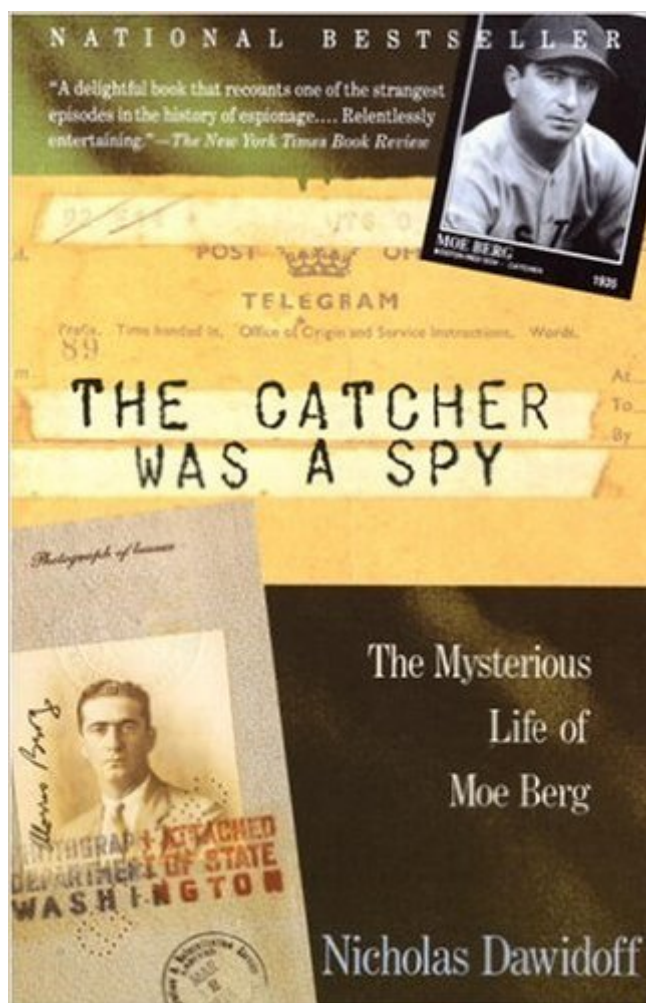


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The Catcher Was A Spy: The Mysterious Life Of Moe Berg



Synopsis

NATIONAL BESTSELLER Moe Berg is the only major-league baseball player whose baseball card is on display at the headquarters of the CIA. For Berg was much more than a third-string catcher who played on several major league teams between 1923 and 1939. Educated at Princeton and the Sorbonne, he is reputed to speak a dozen languages (although it was also said he couldn't hit in any of them) and went on to become an OSS spy in Europe during World War II. As Nicholas Dawidoff follows Berg from his claustrophobic childhood through his glamorous (though equivocal) careers in sports and espionage and into the long, nomadic years during which he lived on the hospitality of such scattered acquaintances as Joe DiMaggio and Albert Einstein, he succeeds not only in establishing where Berg went, but who he was beneath his layers of carefully constructed cover. As engrossing as a novel by John le Carré, *The Catcher Was a Spy* is a triumphant work of historical and psychological detection.

Book Information

Paperback: 453 pages

Publisher: Vintage; Reprint edition (May 30, 1995)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0679762892

ISBN-13: 978-0679762898

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.9 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.8 out of 5 stars 131 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #76,459 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #29 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Sports & Outdoors > Baseball #89 in Books > Sports & Outdoors > Baseball #192 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Leaders & Notable People > Military > World War II

Customer Reviews

Dawidoff uncovers the enigmatic life of former major-league catcher Berg, who, following his baseball stint, became a spy for the OSS assigned to find information on Nazi nuclear capabilities.

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Baseball catcher, lawyer, and spy-Moe Berg was all of these, but first and foremost he was an enigma. All the ascertainable facts concerning Berg's life are presented here, including his 19 years as the most famous journeyman catcher in professional baseball; his stint at Columbia University

and subsequent abortive legal career; his investigation of Germany's atomic bomb program for the Office of Strategic Services (a predecessor of the CIA) during World War II; and his postwar years, in which he lived off the kindness of friends. Dawidoff has done a lot of research on a fascinating subject but draws few conclusions, and his overall theme seems to be the impenetrability of his subject. In the end, Berg remains a mystery. A marginal purchase.--Terry Madden, Boise State Univ. Lib., Id. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

As a historian of science, I was drawn to this book because of a very interesting connection between the physicist Werner Heisenberg and Moe Berg, a major league baseball player. Casey Stengel called Moe Berg "the strangest man ever to play baseball," and Casey was pretty strange himself. Moe Berg was a catcher for the Brooklyn Robins (which later became the Dodgers), the Chicago White Sox, and the Boston Red Sox, among other teams. But during World War II he became a high-level spy for the United States. The story goes that Berg was sent to Switzerland to make contact with Heisenberg and then to kill him! (The United States believed Heisenberg was the key to Hitler developing an atomic bomb.) Moe Berg attended an event at which Heisenberg appeared and afterward walked through quiet streets with him. Berg had a gun in his pocket that he intended to use to shoot Heisenberg. However, after talking to Heisenberg at length, he concluded that the Germans had no intention of trying to create an atomic bomb, so he decided not to kill him after all. If you want to learn more about this unique fellow, read this book.

Before I opened this book, I thought I knew who Moe Berg was, a major league catcher in 20's and 30's who had some role in the OSS. But that isn't even close to the enigma that Dawidoff introduced me to. Berg's incredible intelligence (including a photographic memory), his linguistic capabilities and his reading habits (compulsions?) gave him an opportunity to excel as a student (Princeton, 1923) who then went to law school while simultaneously playing professional baseball. As his athletic career was winding down, he joined the OSS and specialized in investigating Germany's attempts to obtain an atom bomb. This undisciplined loner was an ideal spy for the undisciplined OSS, even though it was that trait that ultimately doomed his career with the more bureaucratic CIA. But it is the last 25 years of Berg's life that is even more fascinating because he lived by his wits even though often seemingly penniless. Imagine someone who could and did converse with Babe Ruth, Wild Bill Donovan, Albert Einstein and Clifton Fadiman. I thank the author for his diligence in researching and writing this incisive work.

Fascinating insight into the life of a most unusual man -- baseball player, spy, linguist, lawyer, raconteur and more. Dawidoff's research is impressive in its depth and scope, although there were times when I thought TMI! -- too much information. On the whole, the book is well written, engaging and most of all, revealing as it follows Berg's most unconventional life, from childhood in an immigrant Jewish family in Newark, NJ, to Princeton University, to professional baseball in the 1920's, 30's, and 40's, to the OSS during WW II, and finally to his post-war life as a wanderer living on the kindness of others. In the end, Dawidoff traces many of Berg's idiosyncrasies to a strained relationship with his father, who could never accept Berg's love of baseball and refused to see his son play. In sum, an excellent read.

If you love base ball, you will love this book. If you love a good spy story, you will love this book. That this book covers both and it is non fiction, a double treat.

Bought this book as a Birthday gift for my husband after hearing about it on a MLB broadcast. It was perfect. My husband is really enjoying the book and says Moe Berg is a fascinating person. He is not even up to the professional baseball part yet and is already hooked.

What is it like to be a ballplayer and a Princeton grad who speaks many languages? What is it like to miss spring training and the first two months of the season to complete Columbia law school? What is it like to be a journeyman catcher and enjoy the perks of baseball travel? What is it like to go to Japan and teach the Japanese the game? Moe Berg embraced a life of wandering curiosity. The first half on his life as a ball player was a delight. The second half on his life as a spy was less compelling.

who would have guessed?

I was fascinated by the 1974 biography of Moe Berg, (Moe Berg, Athlete, Scholar, Spy) when I read it more than 30 years ago, but Moe's brother Sam played a major role in providing sources and that book was somewhat limited and distorted by that. Nicholas Dawidoff has thoroughly researched CIA archives and Moe Berg's copious notes to provide a more balanced and objective story. I had recommended the 1974 book to many friends who are baseball fans, and this 1994 biography is more highly recommended.

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