

Editorial

Debunking Babe Ruth & Leonora Piper

Michael E. Tynn

Babe Ruth is considered one of the all-time greats of baseball, if not the greatest player ever. His 60 home runs in a single 154-game season (1927) has yet to be surpassed by anyone not suspected of using performance-aiding drugs (Roger Maris hit 61 home runs in a 162-game season.). However, to a person not knowing much about baseball, I could, by using the tactics employed by debunkers in writing biographies of famous mediums for popular Internet encyclopedia sites, make a case for Ruth being a very poor ballplayer. To begin with, I would simply focus on his last year, when he was 40 years old, and just a shell of his old self. He had lost much of his power and agility by that time, and his batting average and other numbers weren't close to what they had been during his peak years 5-10 years earlier. .

But even during his peak years, Ruth,, like the best of hitters, failed roughly two out of every three times he came to bat. More average players fail three out of every four at bats. And as for hitting home runs, Ruth failed 11 out of every 12 times at bat, which is an outstanding failure rate. Considering swings at the ball rather than at-bats, he failed much more often, probably 29 out of every 30 swings. If I were to reason like the debunkers do on mediums, I would dwell on the fact that Ruth struck out 1,330 times during his career and not even mention one of the 714 home runs he hit. I would especially focus on the important games in which Ruth failed to deliver and I would avoid mentioning his many game-winning hits. A person who knew nothing about Ruth or about baseball might read my encyclopedic biography of him and believe that Ruth was a complete flop as a baseball player rather than a Hall of Fame great.

It would be a very unfair and biased treatment of a great ballplayer, but that is the very way some of the major Internet encyclopedias offer the biographies of great mediums. For example, my book about Leonora Piper, one of the renowned mediums of yesterday – one whose ability was attested to by a number of esteemed scientists and scholars of the day – includes hundreds of “hits” and dozens of “home runs,” but you won't find any one of them mentioned in the entry on her at one popular Internet encyclopedia. Only her “strike-outs” are mentioned, and the reader is left to assume that she was nothing but a charlatan.

Mediums are a lot like baseball players – and every other type of skilled person, athletic or not – in that they get “hits” and “misses.” They succeed at times and fail at other times. Just as a baseball player must “read” the pitch coming to him – fastball, off-speed, breaking ball, slider, etc.—if he is to make perfect contact with the ball, mediums must “read” the symbols and pictographs they see in their mind's eye if they are to be judged successful. There are those times when they “hit the ball out of the park” with information that is accurate beyond doubt and so private and personal that there is no way it could have been researched or known to the medium. There are also times when they “strike out” by misinterpreting what they see. One “hit” in every three statements made by the medium would seemingly be a pretty good average and far above chance guessing.

But the debunkers and pseudoskeptics, not understanding the dynamics of mediumship, assume that a medium must be 100 percent accurate if he or she is to be judged legitimate, and since no medium on record has ever been 100 percent accurate, it follows, for them, that they must all be frauds. It is scientific fundamentalism in the extreme. They fail to comprehend the fact that there are many obstacles to clear communication between the realms of the so-called “dead” and the living.

Beginning in 1851, Judge John Edmonds, Chief Justice of the New York Supreme Court, spent 23 months investigating mediums, witnessing several hundred manifestations in various forms and keeping detailed records of them. “There are false communications which are not intentionally so,” Edmonds explained, “some arising from a mistake of the spirit who is communicating, and some from the error of the medium who has not yet so studied himself as to be able to distinguish the innate action of his own mind from the impress of spirit influence.” Edmonds went on to say that “sometimes timidity and diffidence will color and sometimes vanity and fanaticism distort the teachings of the spirits.”

The spirits who communicated, Edmonds pointed out, were not on equal footing. They varied significantly in advancement. “Some are more, and some less, ignorant than others; some more prudent and careful; some more zealous and inconsiderate; some impulsive and rapid, and some calm and deliberate; in fine, with every conceivable variety of attribute and faculty. Of necessity, the communication from each of these must be affected, as all human intercourse is, by the peculiar characteristics of each individual.” In effect, Edmonds stressed, those receiving the messages must discern the messages.

Robert Hare, a distinguished professor of chemistry at the University of Pennsylvania, began as a debunker before hearing from his deceased father through a medium. “As there are no words in the human language in which spiritual ideas may be embodied so as to convey their literal and exact signification, we are obliged oftentimes to have recourse to the use of analogisms and metaphorical modes of expression,” Hare was told by his discarnate father. “In our communication with you we have to comply with the peculiar structure and rules of your language; but the genius of our language is such that we can impart more ideas to each other in a single word than you can possibly convey in a hundred.”

Numerous other distinguished researchers since Edmonds and Hare have come to understand the barriers to spirit communication, but mainstream science, in all of its arrogance and obstinacy, has not understood. No doubt there are many of them who understand baseball, but they won’t open their minds enough to see the similarities.

So many of the errors in spirit communication result from misinterpretations by the mediums, or in the case of trance mediums, by the medium’s spirit control. That is because much of it is pictographic, the control or the medium must interpret what the image is intended to portray. When the medium struggles to interpret, the debunkers see this as “fishing” or “cold reading” and cry fraud. .

In physical mediumship, materializations are usually imperfect or very partial, because either the medium is not powerful enough to produce the required ectoplasm or because the spirit trying to materialize lacks the ability to project his/her image into the ectoplasm. But the debunkers scoff in self-righteous indignation and point to how ridiculous it all is.

Baseball players and other athletes have found that when they are “in the groove,” or “in the zone,” they perform much better. Baseball players say they are able to “see” the ball much better when they are in this zone, sort of a heightened state of awareness. When they are not in that state, they struggle and go into slumps. Likewise, with mediums. Most of them require a passive state, one requiring a certain harmony and peace of mind. Mrs. Piper, for example, would often fall into a trance state within a minute or two, but there were times when it took much longer or she could not achieve the trance state at all because of illness or too much anxiety. Other mediums have required singing and prayers for a half hour or more before achieving the proper passive state. When trance mediums do not achieve the full trance state, their own subconscious minds apparently enter into the communications and garble things quite a bit. The parapsychologists then write it all off as subconscious phenomena, while the debunkers again cry fraud.

Baseball players come in varying degrees of skill and ability, and so also do mediums. There have been very few ballplayers in the Babe Ruth category, and likewise there have been very few mediums like Leonora Piper. Some mediums are equivalent to minor league baseball players and will never make the “majors.” And while many people can play baseball, very few are good enough to play professionally at any level. So it is with mediumistic ability.

And like ballplayers, mediums, too, tend to decline after so many years of effective mediumship. Sometimes they lose their ability completely. The debunker will focus on those declining years, as they have with Mrs. Piper, and call it all bunk.

Some debunkers say that we don't have mediums today like Leonora Piper because they were all frauds and it is not so easy for these frauds to trick people these days. It has been nearly 90 years since Babe Ruth set his record of 60 home runs in a 154-game season. Since nobody has broken it, does that suggest that Ruth was a fraud of some kind?

The scientific fundamentalists just don't understand it all, and, unfortunately, the people who manage those encyclopedia sites appear just as ignorant and closed-minded. Is it any wonder that the general public is confused?