

book | review

by **Michelle Xiarhos Curran**

*Take me out to the ball game
Take me out with the crowd
Buy me some peanuts and Cracker Jack
I don't care if I never get back.
Let me root, root, root for the home team
If they don't win it's a shame
For it's one, two, three strikes you're out
At the old ball game.*

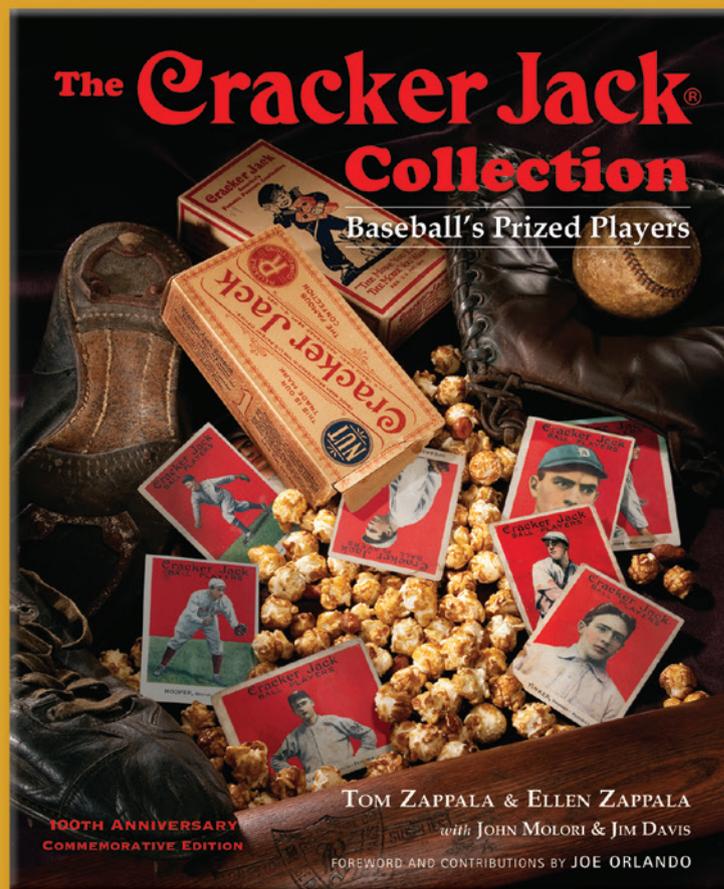
Like the song, the sweet and sticky confection mentioned in its lyrics has become synonymous with America's pastime, as much a part of the game as balls, strikes and home runs. Cracker Jack — never Cracker Jacks as many fans and ballpark hawkers mistakenly pluralize it — has been tossed across stadium seats for decades, and the famous novelties, trinkets and small toys inside have delighted children since the early 20th century.

But did you know that in 1914 and 1915 — as Cracker Jack was just starting to become intertwined with the game of baseball — fans of the caramel coated popcorn and peanut sweet were treated to what are now two rare and highly sought after sets of baseball cards depicting players of the dead-ball era?

In their glossy new coffee table book, "The Cracker Jack Collection: Baseball's Prized Players," Merrimac residents and baseball enthusiasts Tom and Ellen Zappala — authors of the 2010 book "The T206 Collection: The Players & Their Stories" — share with baseball lovers and history buffs the stories behind some of the dead-ball era's unknown sluggers and famous names, including Shoeless Joe Jackson and Ty Cobb, who are featured in the collection. The cards that inspired the book can fetch thousands of dollars today.

Filled with vintage images and eye-catching photography, "The Cracker Jack Collection" takes us back to the early 20th century, before multimillion dollar contracts and endorsement deals, when doctors, candy makers and farmers moonlighted as baseball players and led storied lives both on and off the field. The Zappalas bring to life the players featured on the Cracker Jack cards — which show images of players from the National League, American League and short-lived Federal League against a vibrant red background — with expanded stats, in-depth bios and engaging personal stories. For easy reference, chapters are organized by positions and include players that helped shape America's pastime into the game it is today.

With contributions from several other experts and historians, "The Cracker Jack Collection" also offers insights into the history



**The Cracker Jack Collection:
Baseball's Prized Players**

by Tom and Ellen Zappala • Peter E. Randall Publisher
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of Cracker Jack, which originated in Chicago, and a timeline of the confection's enticing prize offerings. In addition, the authors save a chapter to reveal their choices for a Cracker Jack all-star team, a difficult task given the number of player cards offered in the collection.

From the introduction to the final chapter, the "The Cracker Jack Collection" is an entertaining read for die-hard sports enthusiasts and casual dabblers in sports history. Buy this book for the baseball lover in your life or for anyone who wants to learn more about this bit of iconic American history.

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