

# baseball gloves

**M**y first — and best — was a George Brett model Wilson. I still have it, even though it's too small for recreational softball. Looking at it, I see my name in faded thick Sharpie and a distinctly old-fashioned phone number 3-7131.

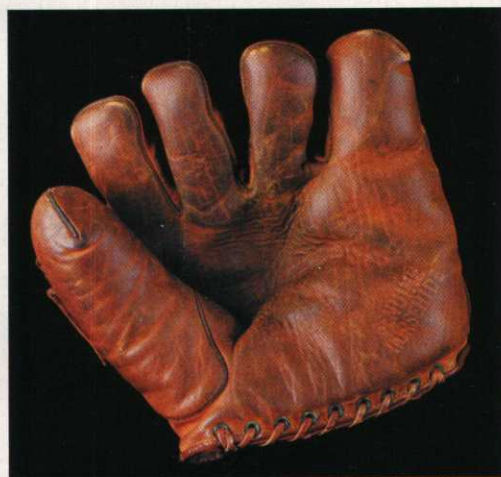
I broke it in with two baseballs in the middle, a string wrapped tightly around it, a nighttime bath of water and a daytime oven of Kansas sun. That glove, now with frayed stitching and a broken basket, rode miles on the handlebars of my bike and was a steadfast friend for more than a decade of baseball.

There's something inherently nostalgic about baseball gloves, and reading Noah Liberman's fascinating new book, *Glove Affairs: The Romance, History and Tradition of the Baseball Glove* (Triumph Books, \$19.95, 150 pages), provides a wonderful history of gloves without losing itself in the pastoral fields of innocence and sepia-toned memories that so often swamp the game.

With deftness and a friendly tone, Liberman takes readers through all the aspects of gloves. He chronicles those who make and fix them, provides a step-by-step guide to breaking them in, gives us a history of their development, peeks at the world of collectors, and peppers the

A NEW BOOK CHRONICLES  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF  
THE GLOVE FROM  
ITS FIRST USE IN 1870  
UNTIL TODAY

BY MARK LUCE



DYNAMIC GRAPHICS

entire book with wonderful glove-centered anecdotes.

On June 28, 1870, Cincinnati Red Stocking catcher Doug Allison wore, according to the *Cincinnati Commercial* "a pair of buckskin mittens to protect his hands." Allison was mercilessly razed, because, as Liberman explains, "Pro ball in the last third of the 19th century was a he-man affair, and part of the deal was you put up with the pain and disfigurement from catching the small hard ball." It would take a decade to lose the "wimpy" stigma, but by 1886 nearly all players wore some kind of protection.

The early gloves looked, literally, like gloves, although they were often fingerless. But over time, the fingers would lengthen and be tied together, the glove would become hinged and, in cases like Braves' ace Greg Maddux, enormous. In addition, Liberman tells

of people being buried with their gloves, major leaguers' superstitions about them, the booming industry in memorabilia, and, hilariously, short-stop Omar Vizquel using his Gold Glove Trophy (it's a regular glove painted gold) during infield practice.

Liberman's journey through baseball gloves' history, loaded with pictures and plenty how-to advice, is as educational as it is entertaining. About the only thing missing from *Glove Affairs* is the smell of well-worn leather. Of course, you'll have to supply that yourself with time, care and the distinctive "thwap" of the pocket cradling a swiftly whistling ball during countless games of catch.

*Mark Luce is a free-lance writer who lives in Lawrence, Kan., where he plays a mean softball with a much bigger, far less cool glove than the ones mentioned here.*

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