

CRITICS

deep impact

When baseball was still America's pastime, every struggle on the diamond loomed larger than life.



PLAYING HARBALL
 The Reds' Hal McRae puts a hard slide on Orioles catcher Andy Etchebarren in Game 3 of the 1970 World Series.

Critics often say that baseball is too slow. Admittedly, there are stretches of inaction that lull even the most gimlet-eyed fans into inattentiveness or induce them to wax nostalgic. But then there'll be an explosion of blink-and-you-miss-it action, often in multiple parts of the stadium simultaneously—which explains why baseball is also the most photogenic of all team sports.

Neil Leifer's **Ballet in the Dirt: The Golden Age of Baseball**—a lush Taschen edition priced at \$400 with a limited run of 1,000 copies—collects the celebrated *Sports Illustrated* and *Time* photographer's best diamond images from the sixties and seventies. It has its share of infielders frozen in midair pirouettes, bone-jarring collisions at home plate (such as the Orioles' catcher Andy Etchebarren getting plowed during the 1970 World Series against the Reds), sluggers (like Reggie Jackson) pretzel-

twisted after missing a pitch, and runners making wild, gnomish gestures as they argue a call. But Leifer was also masterful at illustrating a stadium's atmosphere and capturing the thousand-yard stares that made stars like Koufax, Clemente, and Aaron seem even more heroic.

ART BOOK

Was it, as the book's subtitle claims, a golden age? Who knows? But the game captured in this book does feel somehow premodern, with its retro-techno scoreboards, umps in jackets and ties, and players who don't look monstrously muscled up. Some, like many of the three-time champion Oakland A's, even sport walrus-like mustaches. In our current age of Oakley shades, droopy pants, steroid-pumped stats, and surly home-run kings, perhaps *Ballet in the Dirt* proves that some things are worth being nostalgic for after all.
 —BILL VOUREVOULIAS
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FIELDS OF VISION

FROM LEFT: The Oakland A's celebrate after their 1972 Series win; Neil Leifer aims his 2,000-mm lens. See a slideshow at mensvogue.com.



Neil Leifer (3)