

The New Ball Game ★★★

(2001) 57 min. VHS: \$24.95: individuals, \$59.95: public libraries & high schools, \$99.95: universities & colleges (study guide included). Steve Holmes Productions. PPR (included for institutions). Color cover. Closed captioned.

This CINE Golden Eagle-winning appreciation of small-town minor league professional baseball focuses on the changing face of the Class A Midwest League, while also ruminating on the minors in general. Producer and on-air host Steve Holmes escorts viewers through small-town ballparks such as Iowa's Cedar Rapids Kernels and the now-defunct Waterloo Diamonds, suggesting that small-town baseball is more "real" (although it's certainly less remunerative for the players) than the major league milieu. But this is no bucolic disquisition on simple down-home pleasures: *The New Ball Game* takes a critical look at how major league edicts regarding the operation of minor league teams (and their parks) have helped to drive even low-level teams such as those in the Midwest League to new homes in more populated areas. Indeed, footage shot at modern parks, such as the one for the upscale Chicago area Kane County Cougars, contrasts vividly with the mom-and-pop operations of traditional franchises like the Kernels. Ex-major leaguers Paul Molitor, Dave Stewart, and Bob Uecker comment on the lost world of a thriving minor league presence in the American hinterlands, and outside of the always entertaining Uecker (*Mr. Belvedere*), the single-most enjoyable aspect of this production is the coverage of the motorized toilet races sponsored by one of the more enterprising minor league franchises. A bittersweet assessment of how shifting baseball finances and societal changes have hastened the demise of small-town minor league baseball, this is recommended. Aud: H, C, P. (M. Tribby)