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READING GUIDE:

Andrew Forbes's *The Only Way Is the Steady Way*

Essays on Baseball, Ichiro, and How We Watch the Game

Hello, Readers. Thanks for choosing to read and discuss *The Only Way Is the Steady Way*.

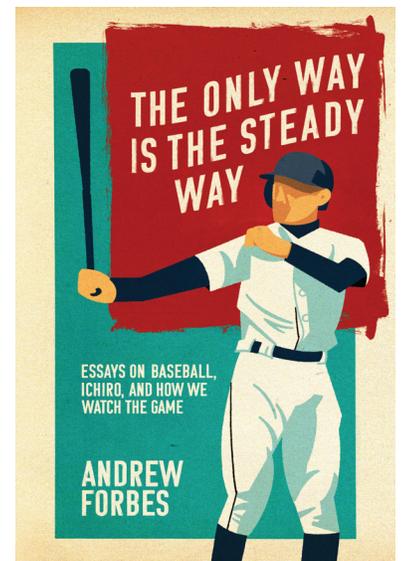
My sincere hope with this book is that you'll let me have it both ways: that you'll consider it at once both a work of sports writing, and also a cohesive collection of personal essays. Both genres are near to my heart, and some of my favourite works of literature blur the distinction between the two. One of the best—and, to my great delight, most common—compliments I received in regards to this book's predecessor, *The Utility of Boredom*, was that one needn't be a baseball fan to enjoy it. Some early readers of *The Only Way Is the Steady Way* have made similar comments, and I hope you'll find that to be the case as well.

If there are baseball fans among you, they might try to place this volume in its proper spot on the shelf of books about the game. What baseball-themed works does it remind you of, if any? Of great value to me, for example, before, during, and after the writing of this book, is Jane Leavy's *The Last Boy: Mickey Mantle and the End of America's Childhood*. I love Leavy's book for the way that it eschews simple biography and grapples instead (or also) with why Mantle was her favourite player, and how she reconciles who he was as a player with who he was as a person.

And if no baseball fans are present, you could discuss instead the form of the personal essay, and suggest some comparable collections. Without wishing to influence the conversation too much, I'll only name a few of my own personal touchstones: *The Boys of My Youth* by Jo Ann Beard, *Feel Free* by Zadie Smith, and *Blood Horses* by John Jeremiah Sullivan. Each of those books, and many others besides, were in my head as I wrote the pieces of this collection, and nudged portions of it in small, barely detectable, but very real ways.

Another angle you might wish to consider is the place of sport in our lives, outside of sport fandom. How does sport (baseball, hockey, Olympic swimming, or any other athletic competition) as a collective experience connect us, whether as spectators or participants? And related to that question: since the particular figure of Ichiro Suzuki is so much the focus of this book, what do you make of heroes? Do you have any? Are they ballplayers? Heads of state? Writers? Why do we adopt the ones we do, and reject others? What function do they serve? Can they offer anything in the way of instruction for us in our daily lives? Or, as clearly fallible human beings, are they best left in our childhoods?

Lastly, if you've had the chance to read *The Utility of Boredom*, you might talk about the differences and similarities between that book and this one. This book isn't a sequel, but it is in every way a spiritual heir to the earlier one. What connects them?



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I'm writing this to you in March, 2021, and more than anything what the book represents to me, right now, is a longing for a return to normalcy. So much of the book takes place against the backdrop of, and so unwittingly memorializes, the simple act of gathering together to share in an experience—in a stadium, in a bar, in friends' backyards and living rooms. If you find yourselves in that bright, post-vaccine period, take a moment to be grateful for the ability to congregate.

Wherever your conversation takes you, please let me extend my gratitude to you for choosing to engage with my work. That really is the most a writer can ask.

All best,
Andrew Forbes

Andrew Forbes is the author of the story collections Lands and Forests (Invisible Publishing, 2019) and What You Need (2015), which was shortlisted for the Danuta Gleed Literary Award, and named a finalist for the Trillium Book Prize. He is also the author of The Utility of Boredom: Baseball Essays (2016). Forbes lives in Peterborough, Ontario.

