Playing Hardball, The Dynamics of Baseball Folk Speech, by Lawrence Frank; Peter Long; EP, p. 182.

Playing Hardball is not just another folklore side book for theBaseball fan who has everything. Lawrence Frank, now an MIT graduate student in physics, has written a scholarly if occasionally pedantic work on how baseball players speak and the implications of that speech.

Frank addresses his subject from a psycholinguistic perspective, an approach, he contends, that may alleviate some readers. "People don't like it" because psycholinguistics, Frank said in an interview. "People become upset out of proportion when actions are recognized to have latent sexual connotations, he continued.

An easy pitch, for example, is said to be "served on a platter." Frank then writes, "The hitter has become the figure of control and is dominating the pitcher who is 'serving.' This may be an allusion to being 'served' — provided sexual favors — in which case the platter has been put in a subconscious sexual position relative to the hitter, who is thus seen as a sexually competent, and dominating person."

Almost as interesting as the treatment of baseball folk speech is the introduction to folklove study. Playing Hardball provides. Most folklorists tend to ignore "slurred" language, which is the most used in baseball and is a form of stress-alleviation by the players, Frank said. This attitude is seen in the rules for what is acceptable speech.

Insults and Phillipian jibes comprise a major part of baseball speech, Frank noted. "It's much different when you insult someone during a baseball game than in an other area," he said. In this arena insults are acceptable; elsewhere they are not.

Frank's approach should not upset readers. "It's important not to take it as a really popularized book," Frank declared. "Playing Hardball is aimed at an 'intellectual, junkie or neophyte.'"

With their career firmly established after the release of War, U2 announced that their next record would be a departure from their established sound, and sought the assistance of Brian Eno, who, apart from his own brilliant work, produced the seminal Talking Heads albums and David Bowie's Low/Heroes/Lodger trilogy. Eno's work of late has been in the field of 'ambient' music, an atmospheric, almost ethereal music exists primarily to be heard as a background to other activities. How do these two seemingly disparate values — ambiance and hard rock — mix? Surprisingly well, as is borne out by the fruit of the U2-Eno union, the album The Unforgettable Fire. The change to the U2 sound is not immediately apparent, especially if you have only heard the hit single "Bad," though the minimalist drone but ultimately fails due to the unfocused ambiguity of the lyrics. A "Song of Homecoming," "Bad" and "Indian Summer Sky" are all fusion-rockers fresh infused by The Edge's lush chordal backdrops and guitar synthesizer work. "(Indians Summer)" also features the added bonus of background vocals by Eno; his only definable presence on the record.

The band takes more chances than ever before, with varying degrees of success. "Pretties," "4th of July" and "MLK" are short, drone-based pieces that would have been right at home on Edge's Another Course World — very moody, very atmospheric, "Elin Peredy and America" adds vocals to the minimalist droned but ultimately fails due to the unfocused ambiguity of the lyrics. A "Song of Homecoming," "Bad" and "Indian Summer Sky" are all fusion-rockers infused by Edge's lush chordal backdrops and guitar synthesizer work. "(Indians Summer)" also features the added bonus of background vocals by Eno; his only definable presence on the record.

Experimental records rarely attain any measure of popular appeal, but this album will prove the exception, possibly becom- ing one of the great CDs of the new, postpunk era.