



The Last Night of the Yankee Dynasty: The Game, the Team, and the Cost of Greatness

Buster Olney

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For an extraordinary handful of years around the turn of the millennium, the Yankees were baseball's unstoppable force. With four World Series championships in five seasons and a deep bench of legends and comers -- Clemens, Rivera, Williams, Soriano, Jeter, O'Neill -- they dominated the major leagues.

For the members of the team, though, baseball Yankees-style was a pressure cooker of anxiety, expectation, and infighting. As the spending and emotion spiraled, careers were made and broken, friendships began and ended, and a sports dynasty rose and fell.

In **The Last Night of the Yankee Dynasty**, Buster Olney tracks the Yankees through these tumultuous seasons and into the scandals and disappointments of 2004, providing insightful portraits of the stars, the foot soldiers, the coaches, the manager, and the Boss himself. With unparalleled knowledge of the game and an insider's familiarity with the team, Olney also advances a compelling argument that the philosophy that made the Yankees great was inherently unsustainable, ultimately harmful to the sport, and led inevitably to that warm autumn night in Arizona -- the last night of the Yankee dynasty.

The Last Night of the Yankee Dynasty: The Game, the Team, and the Cost of Greatness Details

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From Reader Review The Last Night of the Yankee Dynasty: The Game, the Team, and the Cost of Greatness for online ebook

Ebessenbacher says

I hated this team when they were good but I really just have to respect them now. I'm not a Yankees fan but I love baseball and in my newly named tradition of reading a baseball book when baseball season starts this was the first one for no particular reason. It revolves around game 7 of the 2001 World Series against the Diamondbacks and mixes in nearly a chapter each on players, coaches and ownership.

Olney was the New York Times reporter covering the team when they won all those championships in the 90's and he really goes all out on the descriptions. Very detailed and insightful on the make up of the team and what made them so good together. So much of it had nothing to do with baseball skills.

A little slow sometimes but a very interesting read if you remember that team and how dominating they were in the 90's.

As soon as I finished it I found out Olney had just written a 50 page addendum to wrap up the Steinbrenner years. Of course.

Jack Connolly says

Well paced and executed with great research. A dynasty we will probably never again see in our lifetime. Definitely a must read, not just for Yankee fans. A great book by someone who clearly loves the sport of Baseball. I felt like I was watching a documentary in my head as I read this, the visuals he paints are very well done. Very solid book!

Grant Hiskes says

Overall, I thought the book was pretty good. For any fans of baseball, unless you are an anti-Yankees maniac, you should enjoy reading this book. However, do not be fooled by the idea you have that the book incorporates all of the Yankees history from Babe Ruth and Yogi Berra to Alex Rodriguez and Derek Jeter. Instead, the book really only talks about the Yankees' multiple trips to the World Series from 1996 to the World Series game against the Arizona Diamondbacks in 2001, and a mini-biography for each player and significant member of the New York Yankees' front office, particularly its menacing, but successful, owner, George Steinbrenner.

However, I did not like the order in which the book was written. At times, I had a hard time keeping track of everything that was going on. Each chapter would go something like this, a member of the club was identified you were given their personality and the baseball impact they had for the club, but would often jump around to the player's later years, then its earlier years or vice versa without much warning. After everything about the player was mentioned, Buster Olney, the author, would jump to the 'Last Night of the Yankee Dynasty', the World Series game in 2001 against the Arizona Diamondbacks. (I actually mentioned this strategy while writing an update earlier for this book.) To be honest, I was actually fond of the way Olney ended each chapter with events in chronological order of that World Series game, which usually

involved the player the rest of the chapter had talked about.

To conclude, I would have have to compliment Buster Olney on his baseball knowledge more than his writing abilities. Also, do not let your hatred of the Yankees keep you from reading this book, believe me, I am a Red Sox fan.

Tom Gase says

A nice surprise. I've seen this book in stores for over five years, but never picked it up thinking it was about the Red Sox 2004 comeback win against the Yankees, since the book came out in paperback right around that time. I later learned it was about the Yankees from 96 to 2001, but I have a lot of those books dealing with the same subject. I have a book on the 96 team by Joel Sherman, the 98 team by George King, all the teams by Joe Torre and Tom Verducci called the Yankee Years, and even a book about the 2001 game called The Last Nine Innings. This book was better than all of them, and I really liked the Yankee Years and Joel Sherman's book.

This had great reporting and was very well-written by Buster Olney. He uses the 7th game of the 2001 World Series as the backdrop, explaining that game, but then going away from that game for a while to tell the stories of players involved and not involved in that game. What you come away with as a reader are good stories about the 96 through 2001 teams, and a little at the end of the book about the 2002-2004 teams when great players such as Paul O'Neill, Scott Brosius, Tino Martinez and David Cone were no longer around and instead replaced by guys like Jason Giambi, Gary Sheffield and Kevin Brown, who never fit in. You also hear great stories individually on just about every Yankee from 96 to 01, including good ones on Torre, Jeter, Clemens, Bernie Williams, Mariano Rivera, Pettite, Posada, Cone, David Wells, Tino Martinez, Soriano and a very good story on why Paul O'Neill and Lou Piniella didn't get along. A must-read for any baseball fan and especially Yankee fans who want to remember a time when the team had money, but also the same faces on their roster year after year.

David says

The Yankees from 1996-2001 are arguably the only baseball team since the introduction of the free agent system that can be called a dynasty. Their achievements during that time – multiple World Series, two perfect games, one of the winningest records in all of baseball – make some argue that this was the greatest Yankee team of all time, surpassing the great teams of Ruth, Gehrig, and DiMaggio. But what made the team what it was?

In "The Last Night of the Yankee Dynasty," sportswriter Buster Olney tries answering this question by chronicling the team's recent history. With great sources and an eye for telling anecdotes, Olney explains how the team was built from the ground up by Gene Michael and Buck Showalter, how the right personalities fit together (in particular, Derek Jeter, David Cone, and Tino Martinez), and how Joe Torre and George Steinbrenner, each in their own way, guided the team to victory. Olney also takes care to examine the group psychology of the organization and how a team that was not made up of superstars, with the possible exception of Mariano Rivera, nonetheless defined baseball excellence in the late '90s.

Yankee haters may scoff at explanations that involve Yankee grassroots and team psychology and point instead to the many ways that the team gets unfair advantages over other teams (the New York media

market, for one), but ultimately, Olney explains, a team is made up of its players, and these players knew how to get the most out of themselves and each other. Whatever unfair advantages they had could just as well be explained by Branch Rickey's elegant saying about baseball that "luck is the residue of design." Though today's Yankee fans may be dismayed by the team's performance since the 2001 World Series, they can at least take comfort in an organization that knows how to generate success.

Russ says

This book deals with the 7th game of the 2001 World Series between NY and Az. It meanders at times, dealing with the players involved, but it's primary focus is on the game itself. The starting pitchers were a former Red Sox (Clemens for NY) and a future Red Sox (Schilling for Az.).

Nancy and I had just moved to Arizona about 2 months before. Some of our new friends had open houses and we watched the games. That was the only time this Boston sports fan rooted for another team.

Doreen Petersen says

Although I am a die-hard Red Sox fan this book was excellent for understanding to a point the Yankee organization. If you like sports especially baseball this is definitely worth checking out.

Jason Phillips says

This book is a worthy companion to David Halberstam's excellent "October 1964", another book about the decline of another Yankee dynasty. As a Yankee fan, we celebrate the tradition and history of the Yankees, but often bristle at the hubris by which some in the organization think they can create champions by spending money on the wrong players. As Mr. Olney correctly points out near the end of his book (indeed as a theme throughout), it was the unique team chemistry and not the salaries that made the recent Yankee dynasty. The Yankees won in spite of and not because of Mr. Steinbrenner's hysteria. His contribution to the success of the Yankees has indeed been his driving desire to win and the resources to back that up, but in deferring to his baseball people, Gene Michael, Brian Cashman, and others, he has been held in restraint.

What we have now (the Yankees of 2008) is a team that seems disjointed, not playing together, only the expectation of success driving them. This is a difficult culture to maintain. The dynasty years are over, despite the presence of Derek Jeter and Mariano Rivera. The Yankees are doing what built the dynasty to begin with - developing and promoting young players (with the the passion and camaraderie of Joba Chamberlain and Shelly Duncan as examples). When you add smart baseball decisions with the resources and the tradition and the fans - the Yankees are a force to deal with. When they merely survive by clinging to old business models and aging and expensive players, they fail.

Mr. Cashman, Mr. Michael and others in the front office know how to do this, they have done it before. One can only hope that Mr. Steinbrenner's sons can maintain the culture of winning but make smart decisions in the process.

Mr. Olney's book is an excellent baseball book, and not just for Yankee fans. I found many of its lessons applicable in my business career as well.

Lewis Weinstein says

As I Yankee fan from 1947 to today, of course I enjoyed the read. The structure of the book, stretching a detailed description the last game of the 2001 World Series from the beginning to the end, was well-conceived and well-executed.

The Boss (George Steinbrenner) comes off as a heavy, which he was, but I never forgot how much he wanted to win and how willing he was to spend his money to achieve that.

Evan says

As a baseball fan, I was going to read this regardless of team. As a Red Sox fan, though, I expected more about the "cost of greatness" as mentioned in the title. This was more of a book that dedicated chapters to heralding individual players like Jeter, Rivera, Soriano, Clemens, etc but didn't talk too much about why the team had a dip in success after 2004. This makes sense, I suppose, since the framework of the book is based around one particular game. However, this can make for a grueling read as the game progresses very slowly in the book as the author jumps from one player chapter to the next.

A fine nostalgic read for Yankees fans or a solid read for baseball nuts, especially if you tuned into the exciting Sox/Yankees drama from the past decade.

Tara says

The only really unfortunate thing about this book is the title, which Olney acknowledges as a mistake in the introduction. It's an account of how the Yankees dynasty of 96-01 was built, the relevant players and people, and although Olney doesn't shy away from the problems, it is a very positive account. He frames the book in the introduction (added in a newer edition) and epilogue with the root of the Yankees' problem and why it couldn't sustain success: George Steinbrenner.

I think most baseball fans will enjoy the story, but those that overly hate the Yankees will likely find it hard to read. Which would be too bad, because it's pretty great.

Aaron Sinner says

2004 CASEY Award nominee
Briefly: Well-woven narrative

Falling into the sub-genre of "story of this team," *The Last Night of the Yankee Dynasty* represents the near peak of what one can hope from such a book. The plot is essentially Game 7 of the 2001 World Series, woven with repeated flashbacks and side-stories. The interplay between Game 7 and these flashbacks takes place in such a way that the narrative never drags. It's a tightly paced page-turner throughout.

Partly, Olney succeeds by having a central thesis to his narrative: "This is what being a Yankee does to you." Each character's story is told through the prism of what it means for that man to be a Yankee. The franchise itself hangs over everything, so that the story is more than a collection of backstories for the people who just happen to be on this team. Rather, it makes clear this is the story of *this* team, and the characters are who they are because they belong to it.

If *The Last Night of the Yankee Dynasty* has a flaw, it's that the book has a faint odor of over-narrativizing. Olney works just a bit too hard to make everything fit into a clean storybook narrative. He sometimes ascribes a bit too much destiny to the events he writes about in a game that many times can be quite random. A more direct acknowledgement of this reality might have weakened his narrative device at points, but would have rung true in a way that ultimately would have aided it.

But this criticism represents nit-picking. Olney presents a noteworthy event with compelling characters that's well-told and tightly crafted. It's hard to ask for more than that.

RJ Corby says

(Book reviewed after finishing the book in '05.)

Olney's book is a fantastic, behind-the-scenes account of a dominant, no-holds barred dynasty that ruled baseball for the last half decade of the 20th century. The very strength of this book is Olney's access - he covered the Yankees for The New York Times during the team's dynasty and downfall.

In short, this book is can't-miss reading for even passive fans of baseball, no matter their allegiance - be it Boston, New York or otherwise - because what the Yankees do and who they acquire typically sends ripples throughout the baseball world, since they have so much money to spend and one of the strongest willed owners in sports, George Steinbrenner. Even for knowledgeable Yankees fans, this book is a treasure trove of inside information about all of the Yankees stars - Pettite, O'Neill, Clemens, Rivera, Williams, Soriano, Jeter and even Joe Torre. Olney explores all of their careers in detail, from their time before the Yankees and what led them to New York.

Where Olney really shines is when he takes the reader behind-the-scenes, from clubhouse meetings to Torre's private thoughts about lineup decisions and players. He accomplishes with seeming ease what any good writer does - putting the reader in the clubhouse, manager's office or dugout. Another great aspect of the book is the Yankee meltdown in Arizona in the World Series, and he does it with inning-by-inning precision, weaving the Game 7 tale slowly throughout the book. This is quality sports reading.

But, where the book really excels is its passages on George Steinbrenner and his insatiable lust for winning. Even after winning the World Series, the mercurial Yankees owner would enjoy the success for all of about 15 minutes, and then would almost immediately begin to schedule meetings at the Yankees' offices in Tampa to start work on next season. This hard-charging style is what led to the Yankees' dynasty, but George's demand for championships are also what led to its demise. When Steinbrenner deferred to his general managers, Brian Cashman, (and before Cashman, Bob Watson) and Joe Torre, generally the duo pulled off sage moves to improve the roster and strengthen Yankee muscle. However, when the Boss made a move of his own, starting with the resigning of David Wells, against the advice of his baseball men late in the dynasty, it spelled the beginning of the end. The Wells signing paid off the following season - the pitcher had a very good year. However, Olney opines that the Boss got lucky with this move and that the Wells signing

actually spelled doom for the Yankees, because it convinced Steinbrenner that he could make his own player decisions while largely ignoring the advice of his baseball men. The result: a current Yankee team with a barren farm system, high-priced free agents (read: A-Rod and Jason Giambi) who didn't come up in the Yankee system and who lack the chemistry and clubhouse camaraderie that fueled the dynasty years.

The book concludes with an epilogue of the Red Sox shocking, come-from-behind victory over New York in the 2004 ALCS. That passage alone almost makes the book worth the purchase and read. Highly recommended for any baseball fan.

Josh says

A pleasure, especially for the Yankee haters in the world.

Kerry says

This is a first-rate sports book. If I wanted to introduce a bookish friend to MLB and/or the Yankees, this would be a great selection. Thankfully this is not a player memoir, memoirs are so often full of personal anecdotes and tedious evaluations of a player's vices and virtues that they often reveal very little about baseball itself.

Olney's analysis of the Yankee organization is an exceptional look into all aspects of Yankee baseball. He goes back to 1996 when the Yankees became World Series regulars and follows their ups and downs through game 7 of the 2001 World Series against Arizona. It becomes very clear how Yankee baseball success has turned as much on player personalities and management attitudes as player talent.

Highly recommended by a Red Sox fan. "The Yankee Years" by Joe Torre (a mediocre book, at best) makes much more sense after reading Olney's book.
