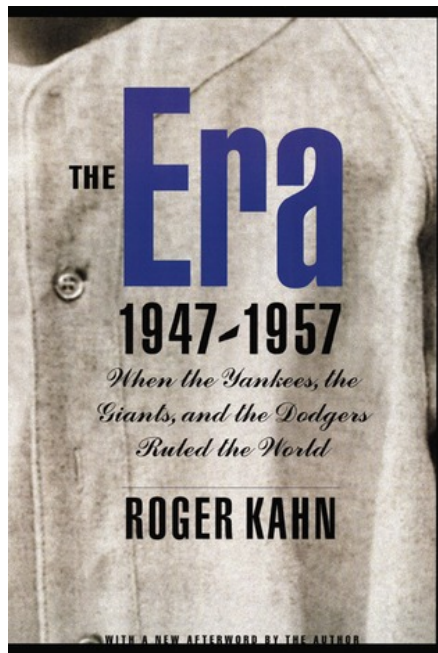




The Era, 1947-1957: When the Yankees, the Giants, and the Dodgers Ruled the World

Roger Kahn

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Celebrated sports writer Roger Kahn casts his gaze on the golden age of baseball, an unforgettable time when the game thrived as America's unrivaled national sport. *The Era* begins in 1947 with Jackie Robinson changing major league baseball forever by taking the field for the Dodgers. Dazzling, momentous events characterize the decade that followed-Robinson's amazing accomplishments; the explosion on the national scene of such soon-to-be legends as Mickey Mantle, Willie Mays, Bobby Thomson, Duke Snider, and Yogi Berra; Casey Stengel's crafty managing; the emergence of televised games; and the stunning success of the Yankees as they play in nine out of eleven World Series. *The Era* concludes with the relocation of the Dodgers from Brooklyn to Los Angeles, a move that shook the sport to its very roots.

The Era, 1947-1957: When the Yankees, the Giants, and the Dodgers Ruled the World **Details**

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From Reader Review The Era, 1947-1957: When the Yankees, the Giants, and the Dodgers Ruled the World for online ebook

Cindy Regan says

This book kind of, sort of made me l-l-l-like the Yankees. At least the long ago late-40s to late-50s Yankees. And of course since Boys of Summer, I have adored that era's Dodgers. I'll even throw a little love to Durocher's Giants. What a fun era it must have been to be a baseball fan in NYC.

Harold Kasselmann says

Wonderful account of the characters and players that dominated baseball for a decade in what Kahn describes as the golden era of the sport. I thoroughly enjoyed being party to some of the conversations of the larger than life characters that molded that era: people like Rickey, O'Malley, Horace Stoneham, George Weiss, Larry MacPhail, Casey Stengel, Joe McCarthy, DiMaggio, Durocher, Mays, Mantle, Snider, Reese, Robinson and so many other interesting and often flawed men. Kahn writes in 1993 but his conversations with these vivid characters are expressed in their words and you feel that you can hear them speak. You will marvel at the stories of a drunken MacPhail and Tom Yawkey, and disappointed in the racial animosity that caused the Yankees to miss out on signing Mays. It is true that the book steam rolls through the 50's after the 51 season, but it still captures the move by the Giants and especially O'Malley's moves to California. One thing caught my attention. Kahn is emphatic that the players of that era were superior to the ones of the 90's. His argument is that baseball attracted the best athletes in the old days because it was the best paying sport and that's where the best talent went. He also suggests, and takes exception with John Thorn in a footnote, that baseball players of today may be stronger, bigger, and faster, but that great ball players need timing, coordination, and hand to eye response mores than the former traits. He suggests further that because of team expansion and the fact that other sports today(1993) pay as much as baseball that the pool of talent is diminished. Most players playing today, he says, wouldn't make the roster of the ERA of 47-57. Nice argument but my eyes and stats tell me differently. (Sure to a degree some of what he says is true but overall we are seeing the greatest talent of any generation). I also enjoyed the machinations of the reporters and ownership in manipulating each other in those days to get favorable press accounts. Kahn suggests strongly that no one benefited more than DiMaggio from that manipulation and that DiMaggio's career was overly idolized by the press. These and more stick with me for now. Great read.

Leonard says

Another great book for older baseball fans. I remember many of these great names and even saw some of them play. I was intrigued by the stories about the owners and the dealings with players and managers they had. It seems that many of the owners needed to be investigated by Major League Baseball for the dealings they had with players, (Mickey Mantle having to work in a mine in the off season to support his family)? A thoroughly enjoyable book for baseball fans.

Alan says

Baseball was still THE national pastime. The latter couple of years covered were when, as a kid, baseball drew my attention.

K says

This is a solid, if slightly strange, book. It's about the 11 seasons when New York-based baseball teams played in the World Series every year, often with both participants being from the greater NYC area: 1947-1957. It was the era of Yankees dominance, as they won 7 of those series, while their National League counterparts the Brooklyn Dodgers and NY Giants won one each (and lost to the Yankees several times). The period was also a heyday for New York itself, as the problems of urbanization had yet to occur in massive form, and everyone in America was enjoying (to some degree) a post-World War II economic boom.

Roger Kahn is one of the most beautiful baseball writers we've ever had, and he brings both his lyrical style and his attention to detail as a reporter to the task of covering those years. Although he researched and wrote this book in the late 1980s, he was a witness to many of the events he wrote about because he was a young baseball daily reporter for one of NY's hotly competing newspapers at the time. Plus, because he made a career of covering baseball, he interviewed and befriended many of the greats of that era and thus was able to speak with them at length about the defining moments of their careers and their lives.

One of the best things about this book is that Kahn both tells you what happened as it was happening, but then intersperses his more recent sit-downs with the principals to go over those events. He gets more information about the details than was publicized at the time. This can be a baseball matter, such as where first baseman Gil Hodges was standing during a particular at-bat, and whether he shouldn't have been holding a runner on first and instead trying to stop a single to his right, which is what happened. Or it could be how a manager like Leo Durocher was supportive of some players who he thought always had the ultimate in competitive fire (Jackie Robinson) but really harsh on others who he felt needed a push (Don Newcombe). And the players or their teammates talked with Kahn decades later about whether Durocher was right or wrong, and the consequences as it played out on the field.

The author also does a good job of exploding some myths. The biggest one he takes on at the start of the book because 1947 was the year Jackie Robinson broke the "color line" by being the first black major leaguer since the 1880s. What Kahn tells is that the skepticism about Robinson and black players in general was more widespread than people were later willing to admit, after it became obvious that black players were great and our society widely adopted racial equality as a positive. While it's well-known that some teams and players tried to boycott Robinson and the Dodgers in his first few months in the league (including teammate Dixie Walker and most of the St. Louis Cardinals), what's less known is that the NY newspapers in Robinson's first months tried to downplay the significance of him being on the team. They didn't preview his arrival in their preseason stories, didn't put him on the front page of the newspaper or even as the lead in their articles. It's as though they thought it was a cute experiment that wouldn't last. And Kahn nails them for it -- with the benefit of decades of hindsight, of course.

The reason I say it's a slightly strange book is that Kahn is a victim of his era in some ways. For example, he chuckles at the excessive drinking and whoring of the players and managers such as Leo Durocher. Willie Mays is always saying, "Sir." Kahn soft-pedals the horrors that were Joe DiMaggio in real life, writing just that his friend "procured" showgirls for him and that DiMaggio could be dour and a bit of a prima donna. In fact, all women in the book are leggy blondes, whether a wife, girlfriend or one-night pickup. That stuff just doesn't hold up well. I realize that Kahn is writing in the tradition of glorifying the players and laughing at the man-child environment, and I realize that it's not great to only read negative stuff like the DiMaggio

biography of a few years ago. But it's still a little cringy.

But overall, this is a really good book. You get some coverage of each season, with the defining moments in the World Series reviewed, sometimes play-by-play and from numerous angles. None of the era's great players gets too much coverage, as this book is more like quick-hitter descriptions of Mantle, Mays, Berra, DiMaggio, Campanella, Robinson, Ford, Maglie, Furillo, Snider, and so on. It feels right.

Also, you learn about the off-field issues that defined the era. Jackie Robinson. Dominance of print media and how the press was flattered and, basically, paid off for positive coverage. And the financial pressures on the Giants and Dodgers -- and the avariceness of their owners -- that led to their moves to California after the 1957 season. You learn both sides of those debates, like the truth that attendance in Brooklyn was way down during the era, despite the greatness of the teams. But much of that could be blamed on outdated, stinky stadiums, and much of that attendance loss was offset by new TV revenue. Neither the Giants nor Dodgers were in financial trouble when they moved, but their owners could see bigger paydays out West.

Tom Gase says

The Era is a good book on what is called the golden age of baseball, 1947-1957, when the Dodgers, Giants and Yankees all played in New York and were three of the best teams in baseball. Author Roger Kahn does a good job telling stories on the teams, and some of its great players like Joe DiMaggio, Jackie Robinson, Willie Mays and Pee Wee Reese, as well as coaches Leo Durocher and Casey Stengel.

I would have given it a higher ranking than three if not for the following...1)I've read a lot of books better than this on teams in this time period. David Halberstam's Summer of 49 and Roger Kahn's own Boys of Summer are better. 2)I get the impression that Kahn believes he is the ONLY writer that can write about this era accurately and it feels like he he tooting his own horn too much. Too many off-to-the-side remarks about how he likes or doesn't like certain writers. He could have left that stuff out. It does nothing to the story. 3)The first half of the book is awesome, written in great detail not only about the season but the playoff and World Series games as well. Then the second half feels rushed. It's like Kahn realized the book was going to be 1,000 pages if he didn't hurry up, so then he goes through the 1952-1956 seasons in about 50 pages. The Dodgers finally win the World Series in 1955 and there is about two pages on it. Really Mr. Kahn? That's all? So the second half of the book feels rushed. I was on page 330 out of 338, and I realized, wow, this book is about 11 years in baseball and he still has yet to talk about the 54 Giants and Mays' great catch, the 55 Dodgers and their World Series title, the Don Larsen perfect game for the Yankees in 56, the 57 season where the Yankees lost to the Braves, and the Dodgers and Giants moving to L.A. If Roger Kahn thinks he is the only writer that can talk about this subject, and he is a great writer, then he has to do all of this in more than eight pages. That being said, if you don't read too many baseball books and don't have the baseball library I do, then this is a great book, worthy of closer to four stars. I'd recommend it to any Giants, Dodgers or Yankees fan or anyone that grew up in the 50's.

John McGuinness says

The real story

During this era I was 7 thru 17 years of age and I was a ferocious fan of the Brooklyn Dodgers, many of whom were neighbors. During that time there was a sanctity of the clubhouse, similar to Las Vegas. Consequently that mindset and our youth provided a rather puristic view of baseball so it was enlightening to

read some of the happenings from behind the scenes as it was to relive those great joys and heartache of our youth. As he did in Boys of Summer, Kahn portrayed this expertly.

Nick Lincoln says

As a fan of Americana and especially of that period of time post Second World War when the USA seemed invincible, I really really wanted to enjoy this book.

The problem is, this is a baseball book. And I know little about the game. I bought the book in the hope that perhaps it would flesh out the game for a novice. But it doesn't; there are no concessions to ignorance here. From the get-go Kahn uses the vast, arcane and esoteric language of baseball that left me out of my (undoubtedly) shallow depth. He also writes in a hepcat kind of idiom - fine when you know what he is talking about, not so when you're already losing the plot.

The book is written for the hardcore, existing baseball aficionado. I doubt whether - in it's original print run - this book was marketed to any degree outside the USA (and perhaps Japan).

The bottom line is I didn't like the book (and rated in accordingly) because I didn't understand it. That's probably my fault, not the author's.

Bob says

In the forties and fifties, baseball was the national pastime. No other sport, professional or collegiate, was remotely as popular. And from 1947 to 1957, New York City, home to the Yankees, Giants and Dodgers, was the undisputed center of the baseball universe. Roger Kahn, best known for The Boys of Summer (the most compelling baseball book I have ever read), chronicles this glorious period of baseball in the aptly titled The Era, 1947-1957: When the Yankees, the Giants and the Dodgers Ruled the World.

In 1946, the Yankees finished seventeen games out of first place while the Giants were dead last in the NL at 61-93. The Dodgers, who finished tied with the Cardinals (but lost a best of three playoff series in two games), had won only one NL pennant since 1920. But everything changed in 1947, starting with Jackie Robinson breaking the color barrier.

In The Era, there were eleven World Series played. Nine of those World Series were won by a NYC team (7 by the Yankees, 1 by the Dodgers and 1 by the Giants. The Yankees lost another one: only the 1948 matchup between the Cleveland Indians and Boston Braves did not feature a NYC ball club. Eleven seasons of baseball; eleven World Series; and a NYC team in all but one of them. And in seven of them, two NYC teams played each other!

So, of the twenty-two teams competing in the World Series between 1947 and 1957, seventeen of them were from NYC. Though the domination of these three teams would continue (the Dodgers, Yankees, or both would appear in the ensuing nine World Series, with the Giants making one appearance), the Dodgers and Giants would be based in southern California beginning in 1958: the Era of New York City baseball was over.

Kahn digs into the amazing cast of characters from the Era. Managers like Bucky Harris, Casey Stengel and Leo Durocher. Owners such as Branch Rickey, Walter O'Malley, Harry Stoneham and Larry MacPhail. And the players: oh my. Some shone briefly and flared out, like Pete Reiser, Bobby Thomson, Preacher Roe Vic

Raschi and Bobby Brown. Others contributed great individual moments, like Bill Bevens, Don Larsen, Sandy Amoros and Johnny Podres. And some etched their names into baseball history, like DiMaggio, Mantle, Berra, Hodges, Snider, Robinson, Campanella and Mays.

Kahn includes his own memories of being a NYC reporter then, along with contemporary interviews of notable participants. And he ties in events of the time, such as the House Un-American Activities Committee (before which Jackie Robinson testified) and Harry Truman watching the World Series from the White House. Every generation seems to romanticize the one that came before. But there is no denying that NYC baseball during The Era was simply amazing. And baseball changed when the Dodgers and Giants moved west. You could look it up (Casey Stengel reference, there). ""

Did you know that the Yankees (bigotry) passed on Willie Mays? And the Dodgers (decelerating their affirmative action program) had also looked at him? Snider and Mays. Wow. Mantle and Mays. Stratospheric. And there is a great picture of young Mickey Mantle collapsing at Joe Dimaggio's feet on a fly ball during the 1951 World Series. The aging Joltin' Joe called off the young Commerce Comet at the last moment. How good would Mantle have been if he hadn't blown out his knee on that play?

This book is an excellent account of perhaps the most compelling time in baseball, on and off the field. It is well worth reading.

William says

Roger Kahn is a clear and engaging writer and this is a topic, New York City's Yankees, Dodgers, and Giants baseball teams in the postwar era, is not only of high interest to me, but is a subject with which Kahn has insider's experience. I wish I could say that added up to the book of my dreams, but it kind of didn't. While the book contains some valuable insights into several important and elusive characters from the period like Casey Stengel and Walter O'Malley and also features some nice journalistic-style analysis of broader cultural changes during this time period and how they impacted baseball and vice versa, unfortunately Mr. Kahn's book dabbles a bit too much in partisan politics and personal grudges. Kahn seemed to delight in exposing individuals within baseball from this period whose worldview was shaped a bit too much by then-current cultural norms about race, and seemingly implying that he is apparently a much better person because he was on board with integration early on. This is a stark contrast to much of the excellent writing about this period of baseball history, where most writers are able to see racism as an institutional and cultural problem that unfortunately influenced many otherwise ethical and good people. It is almost as if Kahn's book presents racism as a problem rooted in and exclusive to a few morally bankrupt individuals who ruined things for everyone else should never be forgiven. Okay, so that was a long and ranty tangent, but I really found that aspect of the book infuriating. On the whole, Kahn's famous Boys of Summer, which looks exclusively at the Brooklyn Dodgers of this era and catches up with the members of that team twenty years down the road, is less tainted by Kahn's politico-personal grinding axe and I would recommend that book over this one. Also, Robert Kramer's Summer of '41, while not perfect, is a much less infuriating tome of a similar, though not identical format and historical scope. And one more thing. Kahn all but comes right out and congratulates himself on his racial progressivism, but the dude has a long way to go as far as treating women as actual people is concerned. Sorry, just trying to give him a little taste of his own medicine.

Rick says

Sports writing as God intended it: punchy, lyrical, observant, knowledgeable, and smart. At some point Kahn

takes issue with the concept of progress, granting that many things (color TVs, weapons, sneakers, tennis rackets, word processors) are indisputably better today than in the past but other things are not. He lists “epic poems, violins, presidents, concert halls, blondes, plays about royalty, and—to put a point on this—managers and ballplayers” among the others. He gives some of the usual reasons that the quality of baseball hasn’t improved, such as talent dilution with the expansion of the major leagues and wealth corrupting desire, but adds new ones. Baseball is no longer the only major professional sport competing for the best athletes. Kahn also argues that baseball is not a sport where the fact that athletes are bigger, stronger, and faster is as significant as it is in football or basketball, for example. Ballplayers are bigger, stronger, and faster but Kahn makes the point many pitchers are bigger than Feller, Black, and Reynolds—Randy Johnson comes immediately to mind—but none throw faster than they did, as fast yes, faster no. Similarly, giants like Cecil Felder, Mark McGwire, and Jose Cansesco (The Era was written in 1993 when there was a naïve presumption that at least for two of those three size was not abetted by steroids) are each dramatically bigger than Mickey Mantle (five eleven, 190) but none of the three could hit the ball further than Mantle. The best athletes in the country played baseball, played it with enduring passion, played it recklessly. Today’s athletes play longer because conditioning and a sense of responsibility for multi-million dollar investments encourage prudence and longevity, but they don’t play better. There are only two amendments I’d put on Kahn’s observation: 1) baseball’s golden era, as opposed to New York’s golden era of baseball, begins in 1947 with integration but it doesn’t hit its prime until the mid 50s and 60s when baseball was fully integrated and all the best athletes were playing baseball, by the 60s other pro sports are competing and expansion is also hitting full stride; and 2) I would add to Kahn’s list of things that aren’t better today: sports writing today cannot hold a candle to the writing of the Era and before. Sports reporting may have improved but sports writing has declined. And the real joy of The Era is the writing, both Kahn’s writing and the generous space he gives to his peers and betters, particularly Red Smith, Grantland Rice, Jimmy Cannon, and many others. (Kahn makes the point that the reporters of the day were well-compromised by too close relationships to the clubs they covered and a willingness to allow much of what they witnessed to live off the record; nonetheless the boys on the buses and trains could write.) The Era is filled with great stories of Durocher, Stengel, Dressen and lesser managers. Nothing can touch the blunt, vulgar speech Durocher gives his white players when rumor reaches him of a petition against playing with Jackie Robinson. In the middle was practical observations about the fact that Robinson was a great ballplayer and would put money in their pockets and that he was only the first so they’d better wake up or they’d be run out of the league. But at the start and end was profane dismissal. He began by telling them they could wipe their asses with their petition and concluded the meeting as follows, “I don’t want to see your petition. I don’t want to hear anything about it. Fuck your petition. The meeting is over. Go back to bed.” Kahn is an insider writing with love and savvy but without cloudy nostalgia.

Tom Stamper says

11 seasons where New York dominated baseball and eventually learned that there weren't enough fans to support 3 teams. The Giants, Yankees and Dodgers were in the thick and thin of it and Roger Kahn lays out the players and then the seasons in chronological order.

I can't say there was anything here that I hadn't heard or read elsewhere and yet it was still an enjoyable trip. Kahn is a partisan of the old days and he lets you know it. The book was written in the early 1990s and tells you that George Will and Leonard Koppett are wrong about today's game being better. Kahn might be right about that although I am too young to have a valid opinion. His other boast that Duke Snider and Willie Mays were better than Mickey Mantle is romantic nonsense though. Willie had the finest career of the 3, but the metrics show that Mantle was the better player of the 1950s.

MJ says

I took the time to savor this one - it was incredibly fun to read. Kahn's first-hand knowledge of the players (both off-field and on) puts you in the story, and therefore makes it more difficult to accept the end (O'Malley moving the Dodgers, for almost no discernible reason beyond greed and ego, to Los Angeles). A little light on Mays and Mantle, but Kahn warns you upfront, and you find yourself genuinely riveted by Leo Durocher and Casey Stengel. The Robinson saga is well-known and perhaps retread here to lesser effect, but the context, and again the author's personal knowledge, add a lot to the familiar stuff.

Personal favorite part - Pee Wee Reese's story.

This does make a person loathe the vaunted Joe DiMaggio, though, and as a Yankee fan by blood, that hurts a bit. No more so, however, than any time the shine is taken off historic fairy tales.

Fun experiment - read this while your spouse reads 'The Kid' (about Ted Williams), and compare/contrast Boston and New York during the Era.

Richard H Ragno says

Brought back many exciting baseball memories as I was growing in New York City. Easy reading and found some interesting facts that I was not aware of.

Brought back many exciting baseball memories as I was growing up in New York City. Found some more interesting facts I was not aware of. Easy reading

Donald Luther says

I sometimes think that my timing on certain things in my life has been outstanding. I discovered the joys of baseball at the end of 'The Era', the period Roger Kahn names as baseball's greatest. Of course, I came to baseball as a Phillie fan, missing out on the extraordinary baseball experience that was going on only 90 miles to my northeast.

'The Era' is an excellent treatment by an author who is regarded as one of the sport's greatest scribes. The book doesn't overpromise, and it deals at great length with the crucial figures for each of the three ball clubs he's covering. I found the book goes very well with David Halberstam's 'Summer of '49' and 'October 1964'. Many of the ballplayers are treated in all three of these books.

But Kahn is a sportswriter first, and only secondarily a historian. As he discusses in his final 'Comment on Sources', using primary sources, like interviews and contemporary newspaper stories, is not without its dangers, for there is always the possibility of some self-serving purpose behind what is drawn from the principals. For the most part, he avoids these, and his narrative is revealing (especially about some of the most famous figures) and even sometimes a bit discouraging, as the reader discovers that these gods have something more malodorous than clay feet to drag them down. But it's a great read for someone who came into the double-digits of my life watching these graceful, godlike figures from afar.

