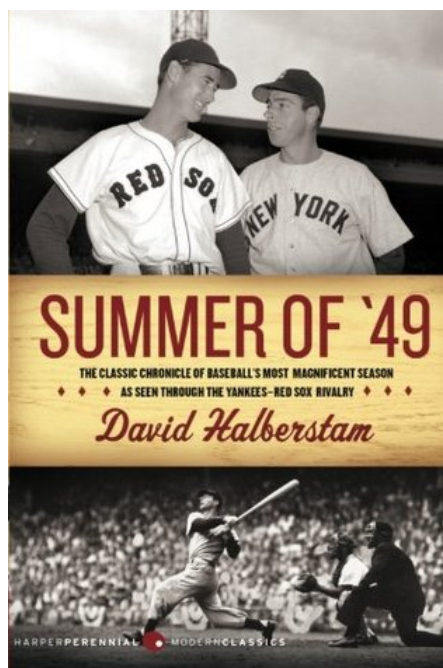




Summer of '49

David Halberstam

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With incredible skill, passion, and insight, Pulitzer Prize–winning author David Halberstam returns us to a glorious time when the dreams of a now almost forgotten America rested on the crack of a bat.

The year was 1949, and a war-weary nation turned from the battlefields to the ball fields in search of new heroes. It was a summer that marked the beginning of a sports rivalry unequaled in the annals of athletic competition. The awesome New York Yankees and the indomitable Boston Red Sox were fighting for supremacy of baseball's American League, and an aging Joe DiMaggio and a brash, headstrong hitting phenomenon named Ted Williams led their respective teams in a classic pennant duel of almost mythic proportions—one that would be decided in an explosive head-to-head confrontation on the last day of the season.

Summer of '49 Details

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From Reader Review Summer of '49 for online ebook

Carol Storm says

Great analysis on the diamond -- but off the field a little too stuffy and patrician!

I tell everyone that this is the best baseball book I ever read, except for THE GLORY OF THEIR TIMES by Lawrence Ritter. And I mean it! This book describes the 1949 Pennant Race between the New York Yankees (Joe DiMaggio) and Boston Red Sox (Ted Williams) in play by play, game by game detail. Halberstam also gives fascinating background information on the entire organization, the stands, the announcers, the press, the fans, and the entire world they lived in.

The only problem is . . . this book comes with a point of view. And it's not a ballplayer's point of view. It's the point of view of a sleepy, patrician, Anglo-Saxon male of a certain social pedigree, who thinks 1.) that baseball is a great game 2.) that loving baseball makes him a regular guy 3.) that while he is a regular guy he's still a gentleman of the highest Anglo-Saxon breeding, and entitled to view the rough blue-collar immigrant players with a certain benevolent condescension.

Or as Halberstam might put it, in his own inimitable style:

"It was, Halberstam often thought, an extraordinary achievement for a well-born, well-spoken, well-educated journalist like himself to have developed such a profound knowledge of the game. It was a sport, after all, played almost exclusively by roughs, and sub-literates, many of them toothless hillbillies from the back country or oily Dagoes from the big city. It was truly astonishing, Halberstam often thought, that his own brilliance allowed him to see the heroism in these men's lives. They were no more than big simple children off the field. Certainly Halberstam understood why their salaries had to be kept low, to prevent them from getting into trouble. But on the field they played like Greek gods, like immortals who would live forever. It was only fitting, Halberstam thought, that by celebrating their deeds he would become an immortal too."

Roy says

As the cliché goes, you can't judge a book by its cover. Those are wise and banal words. They are also applicable words to Halberstam's well told novel about the Yankees-Red Sox pennant race in 1949, for if you were to judge this book by its cover you would think that it was a poorly researched cartoon about baseball.

Once you get past the odd sight of Joe DiMaggio hitting left handed (with a reversed NY on his uniform) the book tells the tale of mid-century America with a focus on its most popular sport. Halberstam paints a few dozen portraits of assorted players, coaches, front office men, and media members that were influential in New York and Boston baseball at the time. He does a great job of stringing together what is essentially a series of mini-biographies to talk about not just hits, runs, balls, and strikes, but also contract negotiations, the role of the media, the changing feelings about race, class and immigration and a variety of other off-the-field topics. This is a baseball book, but it is not about the nitty-gritty events of a game.

Halberstam rightly spends a good amount of time on the teams' two stars: DiMaggio and Williams. It is not a perfect contrast between the two as they are both image-conscious ballplayers that were all-time great hitters, but what does come into focus as the two are analyzed is how they were treated differently by the media, fans and team mates.

DiMaggio was the perfect stoic, a monolith, in some ways as much of an idea as he was a man. Oddly, the death of his father, which happens in the summer of 1949, is barely mentioned. Also, his two marriages don't make it into the book, not even his famous and tempestuous relationship with Marilyn Monroe. I can only guess this was done out of respect for DiMaggio, but it is an odd and glaring omission.

The Williams sections are an honest portrait of a prickly man. Because Williams learned to open up as he grew older, Hallberstam is able to get inside of him more to explain his personality and motivations. After retiring, Williams became a true character who learned to enjoy his life.

Every year during spring training, as I prepare for my fantasy baseball draft, I like to read a baseball book to remind me that the game is still about people, events and ideas and not just statistics. Summer of '49 is a worthy reminder of that.

Eric says

I usually stick to fiction, but a co-worker (and fellow Yankees fan) gave me a copy of this book and I decided to give it a read, and I was very pleasantly surprised.

Even though "Summer of '49" is way before my time, I appreciated it on a number of levels. I learned a lot about the time period, the beginnings of television and advertising in baseball, the difference in the relationship between the media and the players, and the effect of the war on the game and the careers of its stars. I also came to realize the Yankees-Red Sox rivalry stretched much further back than I thought it did, and learned the origin of "Dropkick Murphy's," which is mentioned in passing in the book.

Besides learning more about stars I vaguely recognized from the era -- such as Joe DiMaggio, Yogi Berra, Phil Rizzuto and Ted Williams -- I was also introduced to a number of other equally interesting stars and supporting characters -- like Tommy Henrich, Allie Reynolds, Vic Rashi, Johnny Pesky and Dominic DiMaggio.

I am very glad I read "Summer of '49." It was captivating while being informative, and gives me an entirely new insight into America's pastime.

Jake says

Summer of '49 is a non-fiction book about baseball in the 1940s. The New York Yankees and the Boston Red Sox, rivals for decades, must beat each other for a bid in the 1949 World Series.

There are many characters in this book, and each unfold in different ways. The legendary Joe Dimaggio, and his less famous brother, Dominic, have to play separately, even on separate teams! In the final game of the season, Joe must win to get his World series check, and Dominic just wants to get to the great World Series. Another great character who was in the story for all the years, and through '49, is Yogi Berra, as he transforms from a talented young rookie to a clubhouse leader.

The story was a little off-centered, it started out way before '49, and then finally got to 1949 halfway through the book. I didn't like this very much, because I wanted to get to the action right away. I t took many turns with different teams and different players, before reaching the destination, the 1949 season.

this book is very humorous and has a great arsenal of quotes. It is a funny factual book, showing that you can always try, but you don't always do.

Ted says

4 1/2

This is a MAJOR LEAGUE book in my baseball library.

Availability. IN PRINT

Type. PLAYERS/ERA

Use. READ

explanation

The author of this book, David Halberstam (1934-2007), was a well-known journalist and writer. He won a Pulitzer Prize in 1964 for his Vietnam reporting for the *New York Times*.

The Summer of '49 is about the American League pennant race of that year between the New York Yankees and the Boston Red Sox.

Although the author researched the book in usual ways, his main research consisted of interviewing scores of people mentioned in the book. The interviewees (not all "guys") are listed in the Acknowledgements, in the following categories: Boston players (19), New York players (22, Berra not included!); Players from other teams (9), Executives, reporters, announcers, and publicists (30), and Others (24).

Introductory chapters

In Halberstam's Prologue, he describes the 1948 AL pennant chase. According to Bill James this was the third best pennant race of the 1940s. (He lists the '49 AL race as number 6.) In '48, with one week to go in the season, three teams were tied with identical 91-56 records: the Yankees, the Red Sox, and the Cleveland Indians. At the end, a one-game playoff was needed between Boston and Cleveland, which the Indians won.

After the Prologue, the first three chapters (untitled, like all in the book) form a long introduction to the main story. Halberstam writes about the baseball of the 1940s, particularly the differences between the prewar, war, and post-war years, and sets the stage for the renewal of the Boston/Yankee rivalry in 1949. A lot of time is spent introducing the two main players: Boston's Ted Williams, the Yankee's Joe DiMaggio. We're told of the contrasting levels of confidence between the Boston and New York teams as they arrived for spring training that year. The Red Sox felt confident, knowing they'd beaten New York the previous season, and had just missed out playing in the World Series. The Yankees, on the other hand, were facing unknowns. A new manager, Casey Stengel, was taking over the team; their catcher, Yogi Berra, was still an unproven commodity, who had yet to gain the confidence of the starting staff; and most critically, their superstar center fielder, DiMaggio, started the season sidelined by a November operation on his feet for bone spurs. The operation had not fixed the problem, and by February the pain had returned. When he was still unable to play in early April, with the season's start fast approaching, he was flown to Johns Hopkins hospital for an emergency operation. No one had any idea when he might be ready to play, or how well and how often he could play.

This was critical for the Yankee's chances, or at least so thought the pundits. Early in the spring, the experts were figuring the Yankees and Red Sox as equal favorites for the 1949 pennant. But by the time the season started, with DiMaggio now shelved for an undetermined amount of time, a poll of 112 major league sports writers was able to muster only a single vote for the Yankees winning the pennant.

These chapters also introduce Halberstam's narrative style, sort of Shandy-esque. He takes the reader on a meandering voyage, detouring up a sidetrack, wherever his own interest takes him. This sounds disconcerting, but not at all. The author knows what he wants to write about, and knows that this isn't rocket science, a political narrative, nor a sociological thesis. It's not Vietnam, it's baseball, the reliving (for him) of an exciting part of his childhood, and that's the spirit he writes it in.

The Season

The next ten chapters tell Halberstam's wandering story of the season, up to the final series. They follow the course of that summer in a fairly straight chronological order, but much of the material is tale-telling that extends not only back in time but forward ("in later years so and so would always remember ..."). Every few pages, there may be a vague reference to a date, or a comment about the standings. So I'll summarize that aspect of the story right now in my own words.

The Course of the Campaign

In the early weeks of the season the Red Sox had started slowly, while the Yankees, despite the absence of DiMaggio, got off to a good start. On **June 1** they had a 4 ½ game lead on the second place Boston team. But by **July 4**, the Sox had dropped to fifth, 12 games behind the Yanks. Then Boston began to chip into the lead.

Ted Williams had been adamant with his teammates that this would happen, that they couldn't give up. Williams noticed the Yankee pitchers were beginning to struggle a bit, as the heat of the summer wore on.

Boston was a hitter's team, not a pitcher's team, and July and August belonged to the hitters. Playing constantly in hot, muggy weather became a test of the mind over an unwilling, sluggish body. Sometimes on those suffocating days Williams would feel worn down... Then he would look at the opposing pitcher. It is hard on me, he thought, but he's the one really paying for it. The heat, he knew, would disappear for him in the sheer pleasure of baseball.

By **August 1** Boston had regained 3rd place, 6 ½ back. On Tuesday, August 8th, the Yankees opened a three game series in Boston, still ahead by 6 ½. The Sox took two out of three, and though still in third behind the Indians, were now 5 ½ back. (From this point in the season Boston was to go 37-14 over their final 47 games.)

On **September 1** the Red Sox were in 2nd, 3 games behind. I'll leave it there for now.

Anecdotes

Any self-respecting baseball book would be remiss without a stock of anecdotes, about the teams, players, managers, umpires, - whatever the author talks about. Halberstam's book is no

exception, and he strikes a fine balance between the occasional (usually amusing) anecdote and simply *too many*.

I'll just summarize briefly a few of the anecdotes I enjoyed, then give a longer account of one.

Joe Trimble, of the New York *Daily News*, was a constant critic of a part time Yankee, Nick Etten. "One time Etten left his glove near first base during an inning [this was often done in those days] and a foul ball rolled into it. Trimble wrote that 'Etten's glove fields better without Etten in it.' "

Yogi Berra, when introduced to the "important writer" Ernest Hemingway, is said to have remarked, "Good to meet you. A writer, huh. What paper you with, Ernie?"

Ted Williams used to say that when he was to face a really tough pitcher, he might think about him for 24 hours before the game. But for Bob Feller, "I'd think about him for three days."

Phil Rizzuto's teammates know that he was afraid of almost anything that moved. Gags played on Rizzuto included putting a snake in a gift-wrapped package addressed to him; filling his bunk on the train with live crabs; tying a live bird inside a drawer where he puts his valuables while dressing for the game. One gag involved stuffing the glove he had left on the field during a rain delay with thirty night-crawlers. When he put it on, "It was like someone had given him an electric shock. He threw the glove high into the air and did what looked like an Indian war dance. Both teams were incapacitated with laughter." *Those were the days, right?*

Finally, here's another about Ted Williams. Once Hal Newhouser, with two strikes on Williams

came in sidearm with a cheap curve for strike three. Williams was enraged. Newhouser was a great power pitcher, but Williams felt that this time he had struck him out by cheating. It was a matter of pride, as if he had ruined a no-hitter of Newhouser's by bunting. "A dinky nickel curve," he said coming back to the bench. "I'll bet any son of a bitch on this bench I hit one off him today." It was a bet that no one cared to take. Inevitably, his next time up, he hit a home run.

By the way. Though there are many anecdotes about Williams in the book, there are few about DiMaggio. Why? I would guess it's because DiMaggio said so little that there wasn't much to work with. In fact one gets the impression that the few that Halberstam mentions are worthy of telling not so much because of what Joe said, but just as much because he said anything.

And this brings us to ...

b>The main players

Joe DiMaggio and Ted Williams. Destined to be locked together in baseball history by their accomplishments in the 1941 season. Williams (age 22), the last Major League player to bat over .400 for a season; DiMaggio (27) setting the inconceivable record of getting a hit in 56 consecutive games, perhaps the sports record least likely to ever be broken.

These two players weave in and out of Halberstam's story in every chapter. If you don't want to read anything about either one of them, **don't read this book.**

I'll mention here just one comment about each that I found interesting.

Halberstam, after telling us about the reticence and actual shyness of DiMaggio, says that this era in baseball, and in America, was very much an advantage to DiMaggio's legend. It was, he says, DiMaggio's good fortune

to play in an era when his better qualities, both athletic and personal, were amplified, and his lesser qualities simply did not exist. If he did something magnificent on the field, he was not on Johnny Carson the next night, awkward and unsure of himself, mumbling his answers ... Rather, he had Mel Allen to speak for him. It was the almost perfect combination: his deeds amplified by Mel Allen's voice.

Moving from DiMaggio (and the Yankee broadcaster Mel Allen) to Williams, here's Halberstam on a remark made by Williams' friend, the Red Sox sportscaster Curt Gowdy.

He was ... the least bigoted man of his time. He could not comprehend judging a player by his color or background. Baseball, he thought, was a universe of its own – a better one, where talent was the only thing that mattered. Gowdy remembered him as the first person in baseball to predict the coming importance of black athletes in American sports.... His speech at Cooperstown in July 1966, when he was elected to the Hall to Fame, is notable for its generosity to Willie Mays: "The other day Willie Mays hit his five hundred twenty-second home run. He has gone past me and he's pushing, and I say to him, 'Go get 'em, Willie.' Baseball gives every American boy a chance to excel... I hope some day Satchell Paige and Josh Gibson will be voted into the Hall of Fame as symbols of the great Negro players who are not here only because they were not given the chance..."

Paige – yes, 1971. Gibson – yes, 1972.

The Season - Denouement

On Saturday September 24 each team had 8 games remaining.

Note: **Thanks to the author's meandering ways**, I eventually repaired to the web to get the precise details sorted out. See <http://www.baseball-reference.com/tea...>

This weekend the Yankees played a two-game series at Boston. They came into the series with a 2-game lead. They left town tied, the Red Sox having beat them 3-0 and 4-1.

The very next day, Monday 9/26, the teams played again, in Yankee Stadium. I assume this game was probably a make-up for a game rained out earlier in the season. Boston won again, 7-6. **The Red Sox had their first lead of the season.**

Now each team had a three game series against a weaker opponent, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday. The Yankees played at home against the Philadelphia Athletics, who were actually 9 games above .500, in fifth place; the Red Sox traveled to Washington for a set against the last-place Senators, who were then 48-101.

Each team was able to win, but not sweep, their series. The Red Sox long remembered their loss on Wednesday, when the Senators beat them 2-1 in the bottom of the ninth. This game became known as the “Scarborough game” to Rex Sox nation. (The following is an edited version of Halberstam’s text.)

Scarborough was a right-handed pitcher, and he was nothing if not smart and crafty. Not only did he give the Boston right-handers a difficult time, but he was poison to Ted Williams. He could decoy Williams better than any other pitcher in the league... Forty years later Williams paid Scarborough the ultimate accolade: He said that he probably chased more balls out of the strike zone with Ray Scarborough than with any other pitcher in the League.

Scarborough was going for his thirteenth victory against only eleven defeats. Not bad for a team with a 48-101 record. He was good that day, giving up only four hits, but the Red Sox hurler, Chuck Stobbs was better, taking a 1-0 lead into the ninth inning. A short leadoff single, then a sacrifice, then an infield hit put runners at the corners with one out. Then another hit went through the infield, between third and short, and the game was tied. Ellis Kinder came in, faced one batter, and gave up a hit to load the bases. Mel Parnell came on to pitch. On his third pitch the Senators tried a squeeze, or a steal of home. Whatever it was, it went awry. Boston’s catcher, Birdie Tebbetts, tagged out the runner at home, officially caught stealing, for the second out, as the runner on second took third.

Parnell had the next hitter 1-2, but on his fourth pitch, “he simply put too much on it. It might have been a great pitch, but it broke too much. It was low and bounced wide of the plate.” It got by Tebbetts, was ruled a wild pitch, and the game was over. Ted Williams had been held hitless.

Now, the final weekend. The Red Sox came into Yankee Stadium, two games left, a one-game lead. Still, Boston only had to win one game to wrap up the pennant. But the Yankees felt confident that they could win two. Halberstam draws out his telling of the final series to almost twenty pages, but not me. There’s just too much stuff to choose from, so I’ll cut to this.

Saturday The Red Sox pulled out to a 4-0 lead, but the Yankees, with 2 runs in both the fourth and fifth innings, tied it up. Joe Dobson came on to pitch for Boston. New York scored one in the bottom of the eighth off Dobson. Meanwhile the Yankee’s great relief pitcher Joe Page had relieved in the third inning and threw the rest of the game (6.2 innings) giving up only one hit. 5-4 Yanks.

Saturday night fans streamed to the Stadium all night long to buy tickets and camp out. The game was close for seven innings. Ellis Kinder started for Boston, gave up a run in the first, but then settled in. His opponent, Vic Raschi, was a little better, and at the end of seven it was 1-0 Yanks. In the top of the eighth Tom Wright had pinch hit for Kinder and walked, but the Sox hadn’t scored. Then in the bottom of the eighth Mel Parnell and Tex Hughson gave up four runs between them, the last three on a two-out bases loaded bloop double by Jerry Coleman – a hit that Coleman felt deeply ashamed of for a long time afterward, thinking it had made him an undeserving hero.

The “extra” three runs seemed to make a difference, because the Sox put three on the board against Raschi in the ninth. But that was it. The Yankees had won the pennant, 5-3.

Afterwards Kinder was livid at his manager, Joe McCarthy, for pinch hitting for him in the eighth. He was sure he would have kept the game 1-0, and sure that the Sox would have scored (as they did) in the ninth to win it. Well. At any rate, “he never forgave Joe McCarthy”.

Boo Ferriss, looking at his teammates Pesky and Williams, thought they looked like men who had died in some way. Williams sat immobilized in front of his locker, his head down. He was unreachable. If any reporters approached him, he just waved them away. He later said it was the worst moment in his baseball career, worse than the 1946 World Series defeat, worse than the 1948 playoff defeat.

In the World Series the Yankees met the Brooklyn Dodgers. The Dodgers had become a very good team in recent years. In 1949 both teams had finished 97-57.

Brooklyn’s team in 1949 featured Gil Hodges, Jackie Robinson, Pee Wee Reese, Duke Snider, Carl Furillo, and Roy Campanella, along with pitchers Don Newcombe, Ralph Branca, and Preacher Roe. Wow. Do those names bring back memories to me, even though in 1949 I’d never heard of them.

The Yankees countered with Rizzuto, Coleman, Henrich, Berra, Gene Woodling, Bobby Brown, Hank Bauer, and of course DiMaggio, with pitchers Raschi, Allie Reynolds, Tommy Byrne, Eddie Lopat, and Joe Page.

Game 1 was one of the greatest pitching duels that had been seen in the World Series. Both starting pitchers went the distance. Allie Reynolds was the winner for the Yanks (playing at home), giving up only two hits. Don Newcombe took the loss for the Dodgers, when he gave up a lead-off homer by Henrich in the bottom of the ninth to lose 1-0. “Allie Reynolds later thought he had pitched as well as he did in his two subsequent no-hitters; and Newcombe, asked to name the best game he ever pitched, cited that World Series game.”

The Dodgers came back in the second game with a 1-0 victory of their own, Preacher Roe beating Vic Raschi. But when the Series moved to Brooklyn, the Yanks gradually asserted their dominance, winning 4-3, 6-4 and 10-6.

The Series win was the first for Casey Stengel. And when the Yanks followed it up by winning again in 1950 and 1951, it marked the first time a team had ever won three WS Championships in a row. They made it five in a row by winning again in 1952 and 1953.

Post game wrapup

Well, there’s many more things I was going to relate about this great book. But space runs short. The Yankees sense of entitlement to a WS check; racism in the AL, on the Yankees, and on the Sox; Don Newcombe on racism; **A different era, a different time – an older one fading into a newer** (pitchers not drinking anything during a game, for fear of “bloating”; the coming of night baseball, TV, travel by plane, agents, and of course Black ballplayers); the press and reporters in the two cities; Toots Shore; the radio and TV announcers.

and finally ...

Halberstam writes of John Updike's farewell to Ted Williams in the New Yorker, "Hub Fans Bid Kid Adieu". <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/196...>

He also writes about Paul Simon, in 1966, writing the lyrics for the score of *The Graduate*.

He had sought for one song an image of purity in a simpler America. His mind flashed to the great Yankee player. He wrote down, completely by instinct, the words, "Where have you gone Joe DiMaggio? A nation turns its lonely eyes to you ..." He knew immediately that it was right – a lament for another time...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kDIAM...> (3:00)

President George Bush, Ted Williams and Joe DiMaggio – 1991

The New York Daily News

For another baseball review:

to TOP TEN

.....

Previous review: Days of Abandonment *a bit different than this*

Random review: The Leaning Girl *graphic*

Next review: Dance to the Music of Time

Jonathan Liskov says

This was a great book for my taste as well, because it covered not only the baseball aspect of the year of 1949, but also how baseball affected society and the people in the United States during the time, so it doesn't have to be for just baseball lovers.

Pris robichaud says

Goddamm, But Playing Baseball Is Fun, 9 Aug 2007

"Old-time baseball players and fans love to denigrate the modern ballplayer. "Baseball today is not what it should be," one old-timer once wrote. "The players do not try to learn all the fine points of the game as in the days of old, but simply try to get by. They content themselves if they get a couple of hits every day or play an errorless game... It's positively a shame, and they are getting big money for it, too."

Bill Joyce, 1916 Ballplayer

'The Golden Age of Baseball' began when players returned from the war until 1958, when the Brooklyn Dodgers and New York Giants decided to continue their rivalry in California. That time saw many of the most memorable and significant events in the game's history: in 1947, Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier; that same year, the second Yankee Dynasty began with its first of ten pennants and eight championships in a twelve-year span; in 1951, Bobby Thomson hit the "Shot Heard 'Round the World" to win the pennant for the Giants; in 1954, Willie Mays made his spectacular World Series catch; in 1956, Don Larsen pitched the only perfect game in World Series history.

For those of us who are Boston Red Sox or New York Yankee fans, one of the biggest baseball rivalries in history, 'Summer of '49' explains much of the history and romance of these two teams. David Halberstam brings to us the glories, the rivalries, the drinking, the social and personal stories of the players on both sides. The subject is the pennant race of 1949 between the New York Yankees and Boston Red Sox which wasn't decided until the last game of the season. Is there really any value to another book telling us what a legend Joe DiMaggio was, or what a great hitter Ted Williams was, or what a great team the Yankees were? Yes, indeed. 1949 was the perfect year, because it marked a turning point in the history of American sport, which is one reason why David Halberstam wrote this book. Baseball was the number one sport, but professional basketball and football were beginning to gain acceptance. Television was just beginning to make its mark. The impact of black ballplayers was only beginning to be felt.

David Halberstam brings us the day to day spotlights of the Red Sox and Yankees for an entire year, from the end of the 1948 season through 1949. During the summer of '49, the two teams had one of the classic pennant races of all time. The Sox struggled at the beginning, while the Yankees, took a commanding early lead. But Boston chipped away at the lead until the final day of the season, when the two teams met to decide the pennant. Sound familiar? David Halberstam reveals the characters and gives us a glimpse of baseball during The Golden Age. He interviewed almost every living member of those teams and several people on the outside--fans, broadcasters, baseball executives, writers, relatives of players--over a hundred in all. The one interview he couldn't get, was from the most important member of the Yankees: Joe DiMaggio.

Each team was made up of twenty-five men, plus perhaps ten or twelve others who played a little. We are introduced to every one of them, the drinkers, womanizers, country boys, city boys, the marginal players for whom 1949 will be their only season of glory. We feel a part of the team, traveling with them between games. And at the end of the book, he tells us what has become of them.

In the conclusion, David Halberstam tells us how enjoyable it was to write this book, to interview his idols, to do research that many would consider fun. "I was the envy of my male friends who shared my enthusiasm for baseball in those years. Caught up in the more mundane tasks in journalism or Wall Street or the law, they would gladly have traded jobs with me."

"But probably the best reasons for Halberstam to choose 1949 were, first, that it was a terrific, dramatic pennant race between two hated rivals; and, second, perhaps most importantly, as he explains in the author's note, Halberstam was fifteen years old that summer and a devoted Yankee fan. The men he describes in his book were his heroes, and he lived and died with the fortunes of his favorite players." David Martinez

David Halberstam is gone now. However, his writing will live on, and those of us who loved his writing will remember him well.

What Summer of '49 does for me is to renew my love for baseball, and in particular, my love for the Boston Red Sox. Ted Williams, after reluctantly leaving the batting practice cage, once said, "Goddam, but this is fun. I could do this all day--and they pay me for it."

Highly Recommended. prisrob 8-05-07

Nancy Graham says

Riveting account of the Yankees-Red Sox rivalry, featuring Hall of Famers Joe Dimaggio and Ted Williams as well as a host of other talented (though often less famous) ballplayers, during a heated race for the pennant and a time of great social change. Halberstam strikes a perfect balance between profiling players, culture, and play-by-play to keep readers sitting on the edge of our seats to learn how it ends -- more than six decades after the fact.

Peter McCambridge says

Drowning in detail. Dull and hard to follow. The opposite of bringing a story to life.

Anthony says

Um... it's a book about baseball. It would have been near impossible for me NOT to have loved it. The only way it could have been better would be if it came with its own beer. It didn't, so I supplied my own.

Matt says

This summer, baseball came back to me. It had been gone a long time. I loved it as a kid. I played it, I watched it, I had no idea how lucky I was (growing up in Minnesota) to watch the Twins win two Series in a five-year period. Baseball was the only way I connected with my dad. We never did talk – and still seldom do – but we sure could pass the hours shagging flies. (There is a specific reason guys love *Field of Dreams*: because it is spot-on about fathers and sons).

As I grew older, I drifted away from the game. I went through a long affair with basketball (which included purchasing Jump Soles in a forlorn attempt to dunk). I flirted with hockey and quadrennial international soccer events. Ultimately, as an adult, I settled on NFL football. Football just pops on an HD television, and with limited minutes in the day, it is relatively easy to follow one team (the Vikes!) for one game a week. (Of course, if my wife lets me, I will spend all of Sunday, plus Monday and Thursday night, watching a half dozen meaningless games).

But this summer, baseball started to appeal to me again. I think it had something to do with approaching my mid-thirties, having a second child, and getting the overwhelming sensation that things – that life – was speeding out of control. Drinking helped. It always does. But I needed something more.

Baseball is the immortal game. It mimics the rhythms of life, but never ends. It's a sport with a history that predates the Civil War. It is played without a clock, which gives you no choice but to run out the string. Baseball allows things to unfold gradually. This timelessness calmed me. When I felt my anxiety start to rise, I'd flip through the channels until I found the Kansas City Royals playing the Chicago White Sox on *Fox Sports Midwest*. You want to know something that's stress free? Royals v. White Sox on a June afternoon.

In this newfound spirit, this sudden rejuvenation of love for the national pastime, I went in search of a good baseball book. Why? Because I needed something to read during midsummer tilts between AL Central bottom feeders. Because despite all the great things about baseball – the complex history; the mythic heroes; the traditions; the beer-swilling – the games also tend to be a bit boring at times.

A short, non-scientific survey of various internet lists of best-baseball-books quickly brought me to David Halberstam's *Summer of '49*. It was exactly what I was looking for, which was a bit peculiar, since I'd been looking for something quite specific. That specific things, in so many words, was heaping doses of nostalgia.

Summer of '49 has nostalgia in spades. If it was a color, it'd be sepia toned.

In broad strokes, *Summer of '49* is concerned with the 1949 pennant race between Joe DiMaggio's New York Yankees and Ted Williams' Boston Red Sox. Spoiler Alert for time-travelers from 1948: The battle came down to a final game in which the Yankees beat the then-hapless-now-insufferable Red Sox to go to the World Series. The Yanks then handled the Brooklyn Dodgers in the World Series.

Really, though, Halberstam's book is more a collection of mostly-garrulous anecdotes hung from the through-line of the season. Early on, he establishes a pattern that he follows throughout. Begin with talk of the season, describe a game or a stretch of games, and then segue into mini biographies of the various players, from the legendary, the known, and the now semi-forgotten.

There is, of course, Joltin' Joe:

Joe DiMaggio was the most famous athlete in America. In fact, he seemed to stand above all other celebrities. Soon after he retired as a player, he returned with a group of friends to the Stadium to watch a prize fight. He was with Edward Bennett Williams, the famed trial lawyer, Toots Shor, the saloon-keeper, Averell Harriman, the politician-diplomat, and Ernest Hemingway... Suddenly, an immense mob gathered. Hundreds of kids, a giant crowd within the crowd, descended on DiMaggio demanding autographs. One kid took a look at Hemingway, whose distinctive face had graced countless magazine covers. "Hey," the kid said, "you're somebody too, right?" Hemingway said without a pause, "Yeah, I'm his doctor." For even Hemingway, then at the height of his fame, could not compete with DiMaggio...

His deeds remain like a beacon to those who saw him play. More than thirty years after DiMaggio retired, Stephen Jay Gould of Harvard, one of the most distinguished anthropologists in the United States, was still fascinated by him. He had seen him play in 1949, when Gould was seven. Opening Day, he wrote... is not merely a day of annual renewal, "it evokes the bittersweet passage of our own lives – as I take my son to the game and remember when I held my father's hand and wondered whether DiMag would hit .350 that year..."

There are also less-remembered players, like the Yankees Jerry Coleman:

Jerry Coleman, a young second baseman, was a rookie that spring, and he lived in constant terror. He had been a marine dive-bomber pilot in World War II, flying fifty-seven missions in fighters in the Solomon Islands. But spring training was harder on his nerves. He was both married and broke. He and his wife, Louise, were desperately short of money. They had driven to Florida in the flashy yellow Buick convertible of Clarence Marshall, a teammate who was just as broke as Coleman. Coleman carried in his pocket a cashier's check for three hundred

dollars, which represented his entire savings from his winter job selling clothes in San Francisco...

The hook, here, is that the pennant race of 1949 was a classic. Maybe so (I'm a non-purist in the sense that I think the Wild Card system has really goosed late-summer and early autumn baseball), but Halberstam didn't do much to convince me of this belief. Even if you don't know the outcome, Halberstam's digressory style and lazy, yarn-spinning approach doesn't do anything to build tension. (I didn't know the outcome going in, but I assumed that the Red Sox would lose. They always used to lose, and their fans were obnoxious and self-pitying. Now they always win, and their fans are obnoxious and self-glorifying).

Halberstam is a fine – and well-regarded – sportswriter. And there is a particular beauty in the way a good sportswriter can take game action, which happens in an instant, and break it down into incremental poetry. Still, *Summer of '49* is mostly content to bask in the glories of the old ball game, a gauzy look (lit like *The Natural*) at a time when first pitch took place in the afternoon, when you listened to events on the radio, and when ballplayers were regular Joes taking the train between cities.

It is a soothing vision.

Of course, being the high-strung, supremely anxious, mind-racing person I am, I couldn't help but read between the lines. There are a lot of darker undercurrents beneath the halcyon surface. The struggle between labor verses management (we are so used to the "overpaid" professional athlete today, that we tend to forget how badly ballclub owners used to screw their employees). The difficult process of integration, and the racial tensions as black men made their way into lineups.

Halberstam pays call to these topics – he is too good a writer not to – but he is mostly here to continue the myth (there are no endnotes, and so, so many of the stories related here seem too good to be true). And really, that's fine. There is a place for the hard, honest truth, and there is a place for the legend. Here, the legend wins out every time.

Harold Kasselmann says

I'm so glad I finally sat down and read this classic; there is no disappointment here. What a fabulous read. It has all a baseball fanatic could ever want.

1949 was a bit before my first MLB ball game interest but this book, written 40 years after the season with the aid of most of the principle players, captures brilliantly one of the best pennant chases in history between two of the greatest rivals of all time: the Yankees and the Red Sox. At a time when baseball and American culture was on the verge of a monumental change because of television, this season was still played out in the imaginations of radio listeners.

I laughed out loud at some of the anecdotes about Ellis Kinder, Casey Stengel, Phil Rizzuto, and Yogi Berra. I felt like I got to know some of the greats from an earlier generation that I had seen only for a short time after that glorious season. I loved getting to know Bobby Doerr, Kinder and Allie Reynolds, Joe McCarthy, Eddie Lopat, Vic Raschi,, Dom DiMaggio, and Johnny Pesky. I already knew plenty about Teddy Ballgame(although I did learn how he got that monicker here for the first time)and Joe DiMaggio.

I had expected the book to be more cerebral, but Halberstam writes as if he were that 15 year old kid who shared that exuberance he experienced in 1949 with the reader. You feel his love for the game and for the players especially the Yankees. The contrast between the disciplined, stoic, and money driven Yankees and the more laid back fun loving Red Sox is evident. Perhaps as Birdie tebbets opined, the difference between the two great teams may have boiled down to the Yankees having had Joe Page as their great reliever.

One item left me sad but not surprised. The only player who refused to meet Halberstam for an interview was Joe DiMaggio. The most graceful of all players apparently couldn't be gracious to one of America's best writers. Maybe there was no money in it for him.

Dave Ciliento says

This isn't much of a book review but these were some of my dad's favorite players. It was great to learn some background on them. I really enjoyed getting a peek into his "baseball world" and why he loved them so.

Jeffrey Keeten says

"DiMaggio's grace came to represent more than athletic skill in those years. To the men who wrote about the game, it was a talisman, a touchstone, a symbol of the limitless potential of the human individual. That an Italian immigrant, a fisherman's son, could catch fly balls the way Keats wrote poetry or Beethoven wrote sonatas was more than just a popular marvel. It was proof positive that democracy was real. On the baseball diamond, if nowhere else, America was truly a classless society. DiMaggio's grace embodied the democracy of our dreams."

Joltin' Joe DiMaggio

Joe DiMaggio was 6'2", a big man, but a man graced with natural elegance. Off the field he dressed well, reinforcing that image of cool, calm, and collected. As one of his dates was surprised to discover she was not the focus of the male attention in the room. *"Dining with Joe DiMaggio, Ms. Cosgrove felt, gave her a remarkable insight into the male animal. The entire restaurant came to a halt for two hours. The chair of every man was angled so that its occupant could keep an eye on her date."*

It was a nation wide man crush before we knew what to call it.

On the other side of the coin was Ted Williams. As much as the press loved Joe DiMaggio they hated Ted Williams. The feeling was mutual. DiMaggio was the best player of his era, but no one would question who was the best hitter. Williams was the first to really look at hitting as a science. *"Nothing was left to chance. If he was batting and a cloud passed over, he would step out of the batter's box and fidget until the light was just a little better. He honed his bats at night, working a bone against them to make the fibers harder. He was the first to combine olive oil and rosin in order to get a better grip on the bat. He learned to gradually decrease the weight of his bats as the summer wore on and fatigue set in."*

Ted Williams

Ted Williams was a throwback to another era. *"As he aged he became even more handsome, his face now leathery. he was crusty, outspoken, and unbending, a frontier man in the modern age, the real John Wayne. 'He is not a man for this age,' his old friend and teammate Birdie Tebbetts said of him. 'The only place I would put him, the only place he'd be at home, is the Alamo.'"*

DiMaggio was the Yankee Clipper and Williams was a Boston Red Sox. In the summer of 1949 those two

teams were squaring off to see who would go to the World Series. To make things even more interesting Joe's little brother Dom played for the Red Sox. His whole career was spent in the shadow of his brother, but he was one hell of a player in his own right. The Red Sox got down early in the season, at one point by eleven games, but then clawed their way back into the race. Hollywood couldn't have drawn up the ending any better. The Yankees and Red Sox met in a final series at the very end of the season to determine who was going to win the pennant

It was very simple...**win or go home.**

David Halberstam gives us an inside look, not only at the stars, but each significant player involved in this rivalry in 1949. Most of the players came from very humble origins. They all dealt with the stresses of the game different. Ellis Kinder, the great Red Sox pitcher was probably my favorite to read about. The night before he was supposed to pitch he'd stay up all night drinking and chasing women. He'd pour coffee into himself on game day to get ready to pitch. It is amazing to me that he could abuse himself that much and still be one of the premier pitchers in the league. He wasn't alone, other players as well partied on their off hours as hard as they played on the field.

Ellis Kinder

Yogi Berra was the first ball player to get an agent. A man by the name of Frank Scott noticed that Yogi was being paid in watches instead of money whenever he would give speeches or attend events. Scott saw an opportunity for Yogi to make a lot more money and for Frank Scott to be paid for making the arrangements. The dealings between management and players was also beginning to change. The owners took advantage of the players to the point that it made a Union not only viable, but necessary. It made Tommy Henrich, who spent his whole career with the Yankees, uneasy watching this transition. Certainly some of the charm of the game was lost when players went from being blue collar workers to being millionaires.

I feel very fortunate to own this baseball card of Yogi Berra. It was one of my Dad's.

This is also the era when owners were struggling with the allure of radio and television. There was fear that it would significantly reduce stadium attendance. Little did the owners know the revenue that would be eventually generated from, especially, television contracts.

I've been a long suffering Kansas City Royals fan, but last season ended the long playoff drought that had extended back to 1985. The 2014 season was so exciting it was almost worth the wait. I didn't see these young ball players as millionaires, maybe because they didn't act like millionaires. They played like kids with exuberance and joy that was contagious to the crowds in the ballparks and the viewers on television. The way they played, referred to as small ball, was like seeing baseball as it was played many decades ago.

From the days when players used to run out every play at first; or they would steal without giving a thought to the cost to their bodies; or lay out for spectacular catches in the outfield. These young men from the Royals played last season seemingly unaware of the stats sheet. It was all about sacrifice, hard work, and driving other teams crazy. I have been seeing more spectacular plays this year than I ever remember seeing before and not just from the Royals. It was as if the Royals woke the whole league up and reminded everyone of when a baseball game was as magical as anything Walt Disney ever dreamed up.

Eric Hosmer the talented very young first baseman for the Kansas City Royals. Here them ROAR indeed.

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>
I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

Dee Arr says

Author David Halberstam transports us back to a time when there were no divisions, only two eight-team leagues. With the end of World War II and the advent of television, baseball was poised to become a major part of Americana. Some of the greatest players ever were playing in 1949, among them Boston's Ted Williams and the New York Yankees' Joe Dimaggio.

Mr. Halberstam begins the book in 1948, a year that featured a three-way battle for the league title between the Yankees, the Red Sox, and the Cleveland Indians. All three teams were knotted with one week to go in the season, and when the dust settled, the Indians and Red Sox were tied and headed for a playoff game. Unfortunately for the Red Sox, they lost the game 8-3 and had to wait until 1949. Understandably, Boston considered 1949 to be "their year."

The rest of the book takes the reader into the baseball season of 1949, covering the pennant race that would essentially be about two teams, Boston and New York. Like a great novelist, the author fleshes out the players that were part of that season, sharing stories and anecdotes. Mr. Halberstam also gives us a fascinating view of baseball and its fans 70 years ago, how America viewed its teams, and the relationship between sports reporters and the teams. Along the way, there are many pieces of information for today's baseball fans, such as the first player to have a representative (whose first job was to have a player paid for speeches in money rather than watches) as well as the backgrounds of many of yesterday's stars.

The book ends with another exciting finish to the regular season and includes the World Series with the National League winner, the Brooklyn Dodgers. Mr. Halberstam then takes the time to tie everything up in a nice package with a what-happened-to-them-later chapter, a fitting end to a great book. This is definitely a gem for baseball fans. Five stars.
