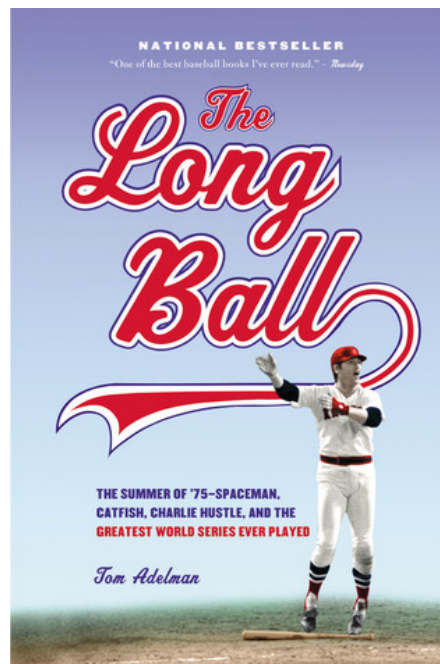




The Long Ball: The Summer of '75 -- Spaceman, Catfish, Charlie Hustle, and the Greatest World Series Ever Played

Tom Adelman

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The 1975 World Series between the Boston Red Sox and the Cincinnati Reds is generally considered the best of all time, and baseball historians often rank its sixth game as the greatest single game ever played. In this resoundingly acclaimed bestseller, Tom Adelman tells the story of the season that led up to that classic Series and then delivers the inside pitch on those amazing seven games.

The Long Ball: The Summer of '75 -- Spaceman, Catfish, Charlie Hustle, and the Greatest World Series Ever Played Details

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From Reader Review The Long Ball: The Summer of '75 -- Spaceman, Catfish, Charlie Hustle, and the Greatest World Series Ever Played for online ebook

Aaron Sinner says

The Long Ball suffers from a few flaws common to “story of the season”-style baseball books. First and foremost, certain passages strain too hard to be lyrical. Second and similarly, some portions feel too embellished—it’s clear the author took some artistic license in getting into a player’s head or in some cases creating an event out of whole cloth and inserting it because it “feels” right. Finally, certain game recaps feel too much like a box score put to prose, with every event accounted for but no passion put into the summary.

On several other points, however, *The Long Ball* gets the “story of the season” formula exactly right. For one, it doesn’t limit its narrative to the two teams who will make it to the World Series, but instead portrays many of the teams jockeying to make the postseason, eliminating the air of inevitability sometimes found in these types of books. Second, it doesn’t focus merely on on-field events, but also weaves in the tapestry of baseball surrounding the season and grounds the season of 1975 in many off-field baseball events—the death of Casey Stengel, the approaching birth of free agency, Johnny Bench’s preseason marriage, etc.

Perhaps the thing *The Long Ball* does best is build to a climax that it tells spectacularly. The seven game World Series of 1975 deserves Adelman’s elegant prose and deserves to have every moment mentioned and explored, so in this section, Adelman’s weaknesses become strengths. On the whole, the book does well in approach, struggles in early execution, and captures well the story of the 1975 World Series.

Steven says

One of the more interesting elements about non-fiction books is that the author has to make a subject seem interesting without overstating the importance of the subject matter. Too often, modern non-fiction swings way too much in the overstatement direction and you are left reading a book where an author spends page after page advancing a premise that is too tough to swallow. (Although I never read the book, I have a difficult time swallowing the idea that salt really has that much of an impact on the way in which all of us live our lives.) I digress, though, to note that I am thoroughly convinced that the 1975 baseball season truly did change baseball forever.

Of course, everybody remembers 1975 for the 1975 baseball season for the tremendous World Series won in seven games by the Big Red Machine over the Red Sox. There is plenty of that in this book, including note that the shot of Fisk waving the ball fair in Game 6 was really the result of a cameraman’s fear of rat. More than the 1975 World Series, though, 1975 was really the last year before modern free agency became what it is and say what you will about the game, free agency did change everything.

All sorts of other thoughts from the book that were interesting to read, including various thoughts regarding the political climate of 1975. Watergate, busing in Boston, the beginnings of the general malaise in the country, it sounds like 1975 was a difficult year. Interesting also to read how 1975 was a watershed year for some of the baseball superheroes from my childhood like Rickey Henderson, George Brett, and Jim Rice. Odd factoids referenced here too like the fact that Barry Bonds learned to choke up on his swing from a bat day watching his dad at Yankee Stadium and Ken Griffey Jr. was indeed the happy go lucky kid we remember from his early days in Seattle. Perhaps the elements that caused me to chuckle the most, though,

were the Vet and 3 Rivers being described as modern, how crazy Don Zimmer really was, and the fact that Steinbrenner was suspended for the 1975 season for his involvement in the Nixon reelection efforts.

Baseball books always make me smile, especially when digested right around Opening Day.

JBP says

After reading Mark Kurlansky's EASTERN STARS, I had to read something else baseball wise and chose a much better title this time in Tom Adelman's THE LONG BALL. This is an engaging look at the 1975 season and world series and the assortment of players that made this year such a special year in baseball history. Adelman uses the first half [or more] of the book telling small stories about a lot of different players/managers as the season unfolds. There is a concentration on the teams in the hunt for the pennant rather than the bottom dwellers in the standings but Adelman picks people that are pretty much all interesting. Then the last part of the book takes up the playoffs and the classic match-up between the Boston Red Sox and the Cincinnati Reds. There are many famous, colorful characters involved in this series and Adelman wrings out the suspense in the games one by one. I found myself really rooting for certain players such as Luis Tiant.

James Poulos says

An entertaining read.

While I was expecting a straight chronological retelling of the the '75 season, the first half of the book instead focuses on a series of small vignettes that try to capture the essence of the great players, passing legends, rising stars and fringe characters that took part in a momentous season. While many of these serve no purpose other than to entertain, some of them try to get at the book's bigger theme: how the game will change with the advent of free agency.

The second half focuses on the post-season, and in particular the world series. The book slows down, the chapters focus on each day's events and the games are narrated in detail. While you know what's going to happen, it still makes from great drama.

To be honest, I really picked it up to learn more about the Red Sox team and players that my dad talked about - Tiant, Fisk, Spaceman. In that regard, it doesn't disappoint.

Austin Gisriel says

An interesting read for those who remember the year and I certainly do. For me, however, this book reads too much like a novel and I had to check several times to make sure that I was reading non-fiction. I wanted to know HOW he knew what Johnny Bench was thinking or what Sparky Anderson said to his son or that Luis Tiant cuddled up to his wife in bed after Game 1 of the World Series. Are there missing footnotes or is this author license? The treatment of the play-offs was also a bit uneven, but the fact that Adelman wove into the story Rickey Henderson who was in high school, 6-year old Ken Griffey, Jr., and other people that fans

would soon come to know was quite fascinating.

K says

This is an excellent (and sometimes strange) book about a really strange time in modern American history. I think the author goes too overboard in some respects in trying to give the feel of what was going on in people's minds at the time, but he nonetheless brings the era to life in a crisp, detailed and hugely entertaining book.

The book is the tale of the 1975 baseball season, which culminated in one of the greatest World Series ever played. The Cincinnati Reds defeated the Boston Red Sox in 7 games, with the winning run coming in the 9th inning of the final game. And that was a night after Game 6, one of the greatest games ever, the Carlton Fisk homer in the 12th game that has been immortalized by the image of Fisk waving the ball to stay fair down the left field line.

I remember Game 6. I was about 13 years old, and I was living in California. So even though the game ended past midnight, it wasn't late for me. I had been taking a piano lesson, and my father picked me up to go home. We sat in the car in our driveway, listening to the game, not wanting to run into the house and miss a second of it, nor to struggle to watch it on our grainy black-and-white TV.

I was a Red Sox fan, but I was also a Pete Rose fan. I was just young enough -- and 13 was still a time of innocence in those days -- that I didn't know that players were drinking and fooling around and taking drugs. I didn't know that players were treated like chattel, angry about being forced into take-it-or-leave-it deals with owners. I didn't understand the racism with which guys like Dick Allen or Roberto Clemente were treated. I didn't know that it was actually dangerous to go to games in a lot of cities because of the drunken rowdiness. I just liked (and played) baseball.

Anyway, this book goes through the amazing array of details that makes up any baseball season, and points out why 1975 was a turning point in some trends that would influence the game for decades to come. So much is forgotten in any year. Nobody remembers that the Reds struggled in April that year before going 41-9 in the summer to truly become The Big Red Machine. Or that George Foster was a benchwarmer until June. Or that Sox star pitcher Luis Tiant had been thought washed-up three years prior and had a stretch in the middle of the year when he couldn't win. Or that Bill Lee was a really good pitcher, and wasn't drummed out of baseball for his 1970 book "Ball Four." Or that Jim Rice's hand was broken with a week left in the season, and he missed the World Series.

And then there were the other things swirling around baseball that season. The author makes a bit too much of them, but they're still interesting to remember. After the 1974 season, Catfish Hunter was given free agency due to A's owner Charley Finley cheating on his contract -- the game's first free agent. And when Dave McNally and Andy Messersmith didn't sign contracts in 1975, they won free agency after the season, and the floodgates opened. Meanwhile, the designated hitter was only in Year 3, and Astroturf fields were just starting to take over the game. Billy Martin hadn't even been hired by the Yankees (he was hired in mid-1975) before being fired 3 times by owner George Steinbrenner. Games weren't on cable TV because cable barely existed, but a guy named Ted Turner was building a TV network, and he bought the Atlanta Braves in 1975, expressly so he'd have something unique to put on his network. Meanwhile, Casey Stengel was still alive (not coaching) and spinning his charming nonsense.

The author brings all that to light, and more. What more? He tells you about a few of the game's next generation of superstars and what they were doing at the time as kids: Barry Bonds, Mark McGwire, Rickey

Henderson, Ken Griffey Jr., Dwight Gooden. The Henderson story is the most remarkable. A super high school football player, Henderson was forced to sign a baseball contract by his mom, who feared he was too thin to survive football. One of Henderson's friends had an older brother, Stanley Burrell, who for some weird reason became at like age 15 the personal assistant to A's owner Charley Finley, basically Finley's spy in the clubhouse because Finley didn't live in Oakland (nobody wanted to live in Oakland!). Burrell looked kind of like a young Hank Aaron, so the A's players named him "Hammer," which was Aaron's nickname. When Burrell, whose first love was music and dance, did his thing as a DJ and emcee, he took his name from baseball: M.C. Hammer. Yes, that M.C. Hammer. He spent his teen years sitting on the phone with this eccentric baseball owner, telling him what was happening on the field (again, no way to follow a team on TV from out of town) and what his players were up to.

So far, I've raved about the book. Why didn't it get 5 stars? Because it's strange in some ways. The strangest thing is that the author goes deep into people's conversations and even their thoughts in ways that he couldn't possibly know. He recalls with quotes conversations on the mound, in the clubhouse, between husband and wife, and more. Or Barry Bonds at age 8 on a fishing boat with his dad Bobby. The author tells you what Casey Stengel was daydreaming about when such-and-so knocked on his door. While these embellishments are interesting and really give you a sense of "I was there," the problem is they're not true. They're composites of things that people said happened, or that could have come out like that because it's how those particular people talked. But it's too much.

The other thing is that his baseball is a little sloppy. The book was written in the early 2000s, well into the "sabermetric" era of sophisticated analysis of baseball. But this author pretends it doesn't exist -- because it didn't exist in 1975 -- and therefore uses hoary old baseball lore instead of the more accurate information we have now. The most glaring example is repeatedly telling us the win-loss record of pitchers as if it's a marker of their excellence. It just ain't. Another example is not explaining how remarkable it was that pitchers would go 9 innings a lot of the time, even if they were struggling, because that's what manly pitchers did. Luis Tiant's 163 pitches in Game 5 of the Series is mentioned, as is Bill Lee going out in Game 2 after a 27-minute rain delay. But it's not dwelled on as almost the last time these types of feats will ever be attempted. Maybe the author assumed the reader is a knowledgeable baseball fan who could just make the inference on his own.

As another example of blindness to baseball as it was played when the author was writing the book, he laments the loss of a certain type of loyalty in baseball, a player and a city for life. He remarks that there will never be another great player in a town for life after Yastremski, except at the time he wrote the book Cal Ripken was doing it in Baltimore and Frank Thomas in Chicago. And we've had others, like Craig Biggio in Houston. All Hall of Famers who played for one team.

Still, overall, this is a really fun read. The author has a love of the game and an ability to describe the atmosphere that's truly memorable. This is definitely an addition to anyone's collection of baseball history.

Noah says

This book is a nonfictional sports story dealing with the progress that baseball was able to make from the time when players didn't have any say about what team they wanted to play for, how much money they would get, and no control of working conditions. The story was also about the games leading to the World Series and the big bats of Pete Rose, Carl Yastrzemski, and Johnny Bench. The main characters were Jackie Robinson, who was the first black baseball player to play the game, and also Pete Rose who lead the Cincinnati Reds to a World Series victory. The plot developed by saying that the World Series in 1975 was

one of the best in history. It was a great series because it went to game seven, and the Reds had a better team than the Red Sox. It was a tremendous series because the Red Sox were the underdogs and weren't supposed to make it that far. Frank Robinson, the first black manager in baseball, "strolled to home plate to exchange lineup cards." In Frankie Robinson's first time up, in the first inning of the first game of the season, he hit a 2-2 fastball over the left field fence for a home run. The crowd went wild!!

The author did a good job with the book, but in some sections, the author was too statistical. It was exciting to know what was going to happen next like a strikeout, walk, or hit into a double play. I learned that players and owners could both have free agency. This was also the first time that blacks and whites were treated equally. For what I have mentioned, people should read this book because it was a big deal for white athletes and black athletes. "The freer you make baseball in every respect, the better the games are going to be. We saw this with Jackie Robinson, and that sense of freedom applies to free agency."

I would give this book a rating of four out of five because I thought the author did a really good job of making the book interesting, but I also thought that the book had too many statistics in it. This book is not only about baseball games. It is about treating both black and white athletes on an equal basis. In addition, it deals with both of the owners of the teams as well as the players having equal rights to do free agency.

Debra says

Some things never change -- rivalries, personalities, strategizing, cheating allegations. The Big Red Machine inexorably moves on.

This is the baseball of my youth, with memories of my Cincinnati friends glued to the screen, or listening to Marty and Joe call the series. Of the celebrations. The book gives me the background that I didn't know at the time and fleshes out those memories. Who knew that I'd eventually become a Reds season ticket holder? Even without the personal connection, though, this is a sports book at its best.

Mary says

If someone wanted to read this book to learn more about baseball, it would fit the already made stereotype that baseball is boring. I have read many other baseball books/biographies and they were way more fascinating than this one. I listened to this book on audio, and I didn't hear about 75% of the book, because it was so incredibly boring and my mind kept wandering to other things. My favorite sport IS baseball, and this book/world series could have been written in a way to keep you on edge wondering what would happen, but no. No, no. It was drawwwwwnnnn out as long as possible and there were soooooooo many people and outside events mentioned I lost track almost right away. This book probably would be more interesting to a person who had been alive and attentive to the world series in 1975, but since I was born after 1975 about 50% of the players I had not heard of before. Therefore, I definitely do not recommend this book to anyone born a few years before 1975 or after 1975.

On a side note, I despise when authors write about how a person was feeling at the moment (when they obviously cannot be inside a person's head) and this happened A LOT throughout the book. At the end of the audiobook there was an interview and this was brought up and Adelman stated he had listened to interviews after the games when the players or managers involved stated how they felt at the time of certain plays/events and therefore felt he could add in these feelings instead of making them as statements/quotes. I don't agree, it was really grating, and I kept thinking "how do you know?!?"

Ed Logiudice says

It was ok. I wasn't a big fan of the addition of the future stars. I didn't care what Barry Bonds, Ken Griffey Jr or Rickey Henderson were doing in 1975. I wasn't reading this book for that. The rest of the book you could get a better perspective from doing a google search on the '75 World Series.

John says

This was a really entertaining book, and I thoroughly enjoyed it, but I feel like the author tried to do too much. His goal seemed to be to try to cover the whole season, in bits and pieces and vignettes, and then the playoffs and the world series. But in order to do that quickly, the pace of the book had to vary widely. He would spend a couple pages musing on what Casey Stengel was thinking as he was dying in California, and then whiz through three months of the Dodger's season in half a page. It was a little confusing in that way. Plus he would talk about, say, May and June for the Red Sox, then just May for the Reds, then April through July for the Yankees, and I'd think, "ok, crap, where were we with the Reds again? Are we back in May still?"

He did spend a nice amount of time on individual personalities though, and that really makes all this work. He isn't afraid to speculate on what people were thinking to create an interesting scene that is probably only 70% accurate, but much more entertaining than just keeping to the facts. And he includes the kids too, many of whom grew up to be famous as well. Barry Bonds, Ken Griffey Jr., Rickey Henderson, even M.C. Hammer all come into the story.

The detail and depth given to the world series is great, really compelling, the personalities all come alive. And on a side note, after I finished the book, I thought that maybe I'd try to find video clips online of some great moments from the series, and I found out that on mlb.com you can download THE WHOLE GAME 6! for two bucks! All three hours of the original nbc telecast. Crazy. So I could actually watch the whole game after I read about it. Isn't it great to live in the future!

Robert says

The book details chronologically the entire 1975 baseball season (starting with pre-season). I didn't think it was necessary for them to go so in depth on what happened during the regular season, but once they got to the post season it got good (especially the classic WS between the Reds and RedSox). I learned a little more about the creation of today's free agency. The best was the story behind the camera shot of Fisk when he hits the walk-off extra inning homerun in Game 6, and how it changed the way baseball is televised to this day. Overall a solid baseball book.

Emily says

I love baseball books and decided to read this one because it was the World Series that made a Red Sox fan out of my husband. I really enjoyed reading it and read it to him at times and heard what he remembered from watching it as a little kid.

I loved the details about each of the different players: Bench, Bonds, Yaz, Fisk, Rose, Catfish, etc. I loved hearing about Casey Stengel, Billy Martin, Barry Bonds, Ken Griffey Jr., and others who played a small role in the book. The details and even fictionalized conversations and thoughts of the players really held my interest and helped the people to come alive. I especially loved hearing about Luis Tiant and his story of leaving Cuba and not being able to see or even send money to his parents for 14 years. They were given permission to come to the United States and finally see their son pitch in time for this World Series. There were a lot of interesting stories like this about each of the players that really added to the book.

I liked the details and history about strategy at the time and how management worked and the struggles and tension between the front office and the players. What I didn't like was how it seemed to jump around so much in order to flesh out the details and stories about each of the many varied players and people highlighted.

Ultimately, I'm glad he covered such a large time period in the book (most of the 1975 season) because I loved learning about it, but I think it was almost too large to fit into one book and therefore caused the book to jump around a lot.

I read this book and also listened to portions of the audio book. At the end of the audio book there was an excellent interview with the author that made me like this book even more. He went into detail about how he compiled the details for this book. He did a LOT of research for it and I liked hearing his feelings about how things changed after the 1975 Seitz decision. It's hard to make a historical account interesting but this one was.

Jay says

best baseball book ever. documents a shift in baseball: catfish hunter becomes the first free agent and stars like carl yastrzemski enter the twilight of their careers. it also explains the famous shot of carlton fisk waving the home run fair: there was a rat in the booth where the long shot camera was and the cameraman freaked out and left, leaving only the close up cameraman to shoot. it was an accident, and the first time a televised broadcast ever showed a close up of a player's reaction to the game. soon every camera shot did this, countless other players entered free agency, and the modern sports superstar was born. read it.

Spiros says

A masterful overview of one of Baseball's watershed years, this book poignantly explores the timeless interconnections inherent in the game's history, from Casey Stengel's last days in Los Angeles, to Rickey Henderson, trying to get his mother to allow him to play football, to 6-year old Ken Griffey Jr., cheering his father on at Baseball's biggest stage. Along the way we are given insight into the careers of such disparate figures as Dick Allen, Catfish Hunter, and my favorite player when I was growing up, Bobby Bonds.

Kurt says

Loved every second of the audiobook.

Adrian says

An easy romp for any baseball fan who remembers this year. Adelman incorporates some social life and politics of the time to round out the story and increases my enjoyment. Including the reactions of youths (at the time) Ken Griffey Jr. and Barry Bonds and anonymous fans is less successful. He defends concentrating on 1975 because it was the final year of ball before free agency took over and while that's interesting it's still the baseball reporting that stands out. The Red Sox-Reds series was even greater than I remember it.

Mary says

The thing is, I already know who wins this one, but STILL I listen with breath held, hoping, hoping...
Now THAT'S good writing.

This book opens the players up, reminding us that they're human and not ball-playing gods. It describes the game with bold, grubby truth, with warm affection, with wry humor and heart aching reminiscence. There are thousands of characters including the rats of Fenway, if you can imagine!
I don't know how it reads, but the narration of the book by Richard M. Davidson brings this story to life and I'm sorry the story has drawn to an end.

If you love baseball....not necessarily a Red Sox or Reds fan, but BASEBALL....listen to this one.
I'm pretty sure Ken Burns did.

Dustin says

I'm a baseball fan in general, and I enjoy baseball histories. I grabbed this because it looked interesting. I had no idea that the 1975 season was as crazy and exciting as it was. I mean, yes, we all know about Carlton Fiske waving the ball fair. But I didn't know much else. The book was so well written that I thought I was reading an excellent novel. There was so much going on that year it's amazing. But Adelman did a magnificent job tying it all together. And the fact that it ends in one of the most classic World Series of all time just makes it that much better. (Unless you're a Red Sox fan.)

Jimmy Tarlau says

A fun book especially if you're a baseball fan. I don't particularly remember the 75 season I was more interested in politics, etc. but I do remember many of the personalities from when I was a child and from later on. He makes all the players real personalities with their traditional quirks and famous characteristics. He stays in the heads of players during key moments. Whether he made those thoughts up or listened to interviews with them on what they were thinking I'll have to find out. The book drags a little at the end with each game of the world series going on a little too long but I enjoyed listening to it quite a bit.
