



New book walks down memory lane of city's best sportswriting

*By Dr. David Fletcher, President of the Chicago Baseball Museum
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Veteran Chicago sports writer Ron Rapoport has put together a tour de force collection of the best Chicago sportswriting in "From Black Sox to Three-Peats: A Century of Chicago's Best Sportswriting from the Tribune, Sun-Times, and Other Newspapers."

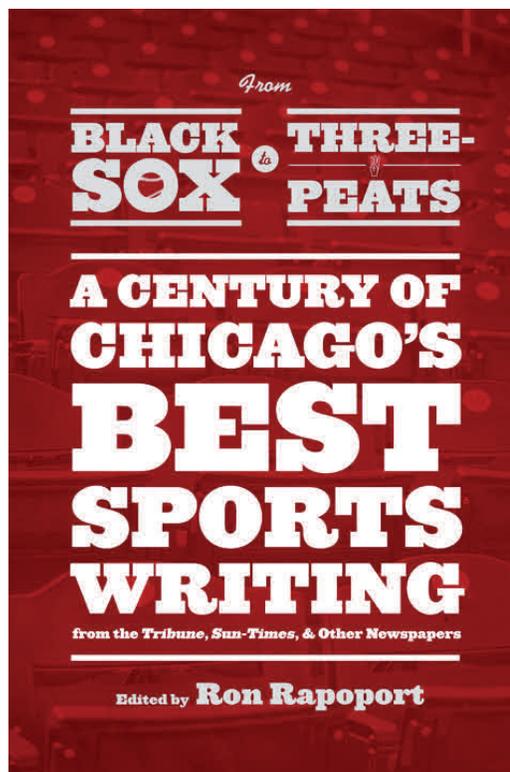
Published by the University of Chicago, Rapoport's 312-page tome includes an all-star line-up of Chicago-based writers who wrote memorable stories about the Chicago sports scene.

Baseball dominates the selected pieces by Rapoport, who served two tours of duty at the Chicago Sun-Times -- as sports columnist from 1977 until 1988 and 1998 to 2007.

He organizes the book into a series of themes that could only appear in a Chicago sports anthology:

1. Pioneers
2. Legends and Heroes
3. Only in Chicago
4. Magic Moments
5. Any Team Can Have a Bad Century
6. Michael
7. Neighborhoods
8. Sidekicks and Amateurs, Forgotten Men, and Lost Teams, Hustlers, and Clown
9. The Real World
10. Battles Won and Lost
11. From the Heart

Rapoport laments the change in sports journalism with beat reporters and columnists tweeting and blogging in the harsh glare of 24/7 sports radio/TV/internet coverage. The present situation assures that readers already know what happened, spurring one sports editor to tell his writers: "I need you to tell me why it happened and what you think about it."



"From Black Sox to Three-Peats: A Century of Chicago's Best Sportswriting from the Tribune, Sun-Times, and Other Newspapers," a new collection of sports articles edited by Ron Rapoport.



Ron Rapoport, who served as sports columnist for the Chicago Sun-Times from 1977 until 1988 and 1998 to 2007.

Those words of advice ring throughout the selection of pieces that Rapoport used in the book. He uses Chicago Tribune editor Arch Ward's July 6, 1933 piece "The Game of the Century" to explain why he came up with the idea of the All-Star game first played this day at Comiskey Park. "The next day we called upon William Veeck, president of the Cubs. He said it was the tonic that baseball needed." The game quickly became a highlight of the baseball season, writes Rapoport, who authors a brief comment after each column to explain the piece's present-day significance.

In Nov. 2007, the Chicago Baseball Museum was fortunate to have acquired the collection of Jerome Holtzman. Two of Jerome's columns appear in this anthology. One is "Bill Veeck: A Man for All Seasons" that appeared after the death of Bill Veeck in Jan. 1986. The CBM is fortunate to have rough drafts of both Holtzman columns that appear in this book that help illustrate how veteran sportswriters work their craft and compose pieces like this one that are timeless and will evoke a memory or an emotion decades later.

Some lesser-known writers are included in this anthology and show the depth of Rapoport's mining of Chicago's rich sports history. He revives a seminal piece in *The Defender*: "A Polecat in the Hotel: Major Leaguers Fail to Drop

Color Bar" from Dec. 12, 1942. This piece laments the fact that Major League baseball "side-stepped the issue question of admitting Negroes into the big leagues at the annual meeting of the two leagues at the Palmer House." Likewise, he later includes pioneering black writer Wendell Smith's piece "We Are Tired of Staying in Flop Houses" that appeared in the Jan. 23, 1961 issue of the *Chicago American* that talked about the on-going prejudice and injustice experienced by African-American ballplayers during spring training in the South. This piece and a follow-up story helped influence the Sox to buy their own hotel in Sarasota in 1962 to end the separate living quarters for the team's black players.

I read this book cover to cover in one night as it triggered a flood of memories and how important sports is in our lives.

I am still crying from the Chicago Sun-Times columnist Richard Roeper's "There Were Lots of Clowns, but Only One Andy" about the Sept. 1995 death of Andy the Clown, who had entertained Sox fans in old Comiskey Park for 30 years with his chant, "Go yoooooooooooooooooooo White Sox!" But Andy was shunned when the Sox moved across the street to The Cell in 1991. Roeper writes: "What was cool about Andy was that he just showed up, and the White Sox just sort of tolerated him. He wasn't a graduate of Mascot School, which is a real place." Roeper closes the piece with: "Last Thursday night Andrew Rozdilsky collapsed in his South Side home. He died at Holy Cross Hospital. He was 77. If he

ever gave you a smile when you were out at the old ballpark, send him a prayer or a good thought today.”

It took me about 10 minutes to compose myself after reading this because Andy the Clown represented a unique, charming Chicago sports fixture.

I had talked to Andy in the early 90s several times about how he felt that he was no longer appreciated by the Sox in the new ballpark. Trying to explain Andy to my 32-year-old girlfriend was a real challenge. I kept telling her he was the Sox version of the Cubs’ Ronnie Woo-Woo Wickers.

In closing, "From Black Sox to Three Peats" is one of the best sports compendiums ever put together. I must provide full disclosure that this writer and his work on the Clearbuck.com campaign appears in one the columns written by Mike Downey, who wrote “High Time for Bud Selig to Pardon Buck Weaver” that was published in the Chicago Tribune before Game One of the 2005 World Series on Oct. 20, 2005. Downey pleads that Commissioner Selig to reinstate Buck Weaver:

“I don’t know about you, Bud, but all my life I have wanted to do one really good thing. Correct an injustice. Right a wrong. Do something of merit, something magnanimous, something more than watch a man catch a ball or report a score. You can. You have the power. And what a gesture it would be on your part, to let Chicago have a World Series back in town and have a World Series hero back (Weaver was 18 for 57 for .327 average in two World Series appearances), all in one fall sweep.”

Rapoport laments: “Buck Weaver remains on baseball’s suspended list.”

I lament that Rapoport failed to find a suitable Bill Bailey piece. "Bill Bailey" was the pen name of William Louis Veeck, who went from the typewriter to boardroom by becoming the Cubs president in 1919 after Cubs owner William Wrigley, Jr. liked what he saw in Veeck and his analysis of Chicago baseball. Rapoport told this writer that he just could not find a suitable piece. Maybe when Rapoport writes a second volume of Chicago’s Best Sports Writing he will find a Bill Bailey piece that fits.

What a great experience it must have been for Rapoport to read these great writers and select the best 100 pieces. He only uses two of his own pieces, a 1983 look back at Leo Durocher and a 1982 piece entitled “Roof Bums.”

The CBM’s Paul Ladewski’s Ron Santo column “I Am Way Ahead of the Game” that appeared in the Daily Southtown on April 16 2002 is also a real gem that is included in this book.

Andy the Clown will live forever in these pages.