

BASEBALL UNDER GLASS

'A Season For The Ages' should be choice in crowded Cubs book field

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So many Cubs books. Which to buy for a holiday gift?

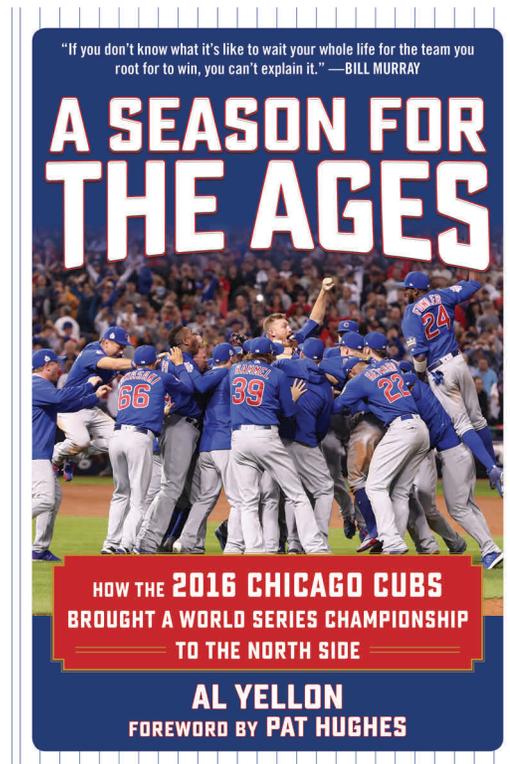
Drug-store checkout counters are inundated with half a dozen quickie thick magazines by every major local newspaper operation and national sports outlets. An "I know Joe Maddon" book – without any real access to Maddon and his Cub bosses, coaches or players – is even being sold in the mini-marts of gas stations. Big media names recycled their broadcast and magazine interviews to craft into books.

So with all that quantity out there, I'd pick "A Season For The Ages" by BleedCubbieBlue.com managing editor Al Yellon. Choose the book by the legitimate Cubs fan who has attended the vast majority of Wrigley Field games, and many on the road, for decades. Rain or shine, 35 degrees or 100, ironman Yellon is out in his left-field bleacher seat, watching history roll by.

The Highland Park, Ill.-raised Yellon has been a Cubs fan since 1963. That's a lot longer than anyone connected with the team, including the four siblings in ownership, can claim. Such seniority provides Yellon with the proper perspective to both set up the decades leading up to the Cubs' championship journey and provide a narrative of the 2016 season.

If anything, I'd have wanted Sports Publishing, an imprint of Skyhorse, to have given Yellon even more time to research "A Season For the Ages." He wrote like a madman since August. The Cubs' success had been foreshadowed back in the summer of 2015. But as with many books tied to a team's success, it became a two-minute drill.

Only a 53-year fan can truly bring out the emotion of what it's like to wander endlessly through a desert of losing, late-season and playoff collapses and utter owner/



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management incompetence, then show the exultation of the season that started out swimmingly, had only a brief stumble, and climaxed with dramatic comebacks in October and November.

The season itself was so thoroughly chronicled by so many sources. I believe Yellon's narrative works best when he talks about the vantage point from the bleachers of himself and his fellow fans. Beaten down so often, yet always hopeful, it's uplifting to see the fans watch a powerhouse team come together. The fans' own confidence thus grows.

Cincinnati-based author Lonnie Wheeler crafted a memorable look at fans in what was then the cheap seats in "Bleachers" back in 1987. I would have liked to have seen even more byplay among those who paid \$1 for the bleachers 45 years ago and \$5 as the 20th century wrapped up, but are now digging far deeper in their wallets to watch from above the vines and basket. The sense of growing anticipation by the fans was a priceless emotion.

Maybe that angle will be pursued in Yellon's logical next book, "Repeat!!" Until then, crack "A Season For the Ages." You cannot get enough of the 2016 Cubs.

A diplomatic good-luck charm for Cubs?

Perhaps Aviv Ezra will read Yellon's book. He's certainly enthusiastic enough about the Cubs.

But Ezra, the new consul general for Israel in the Midwest, goes even further than being just a passive observer of the champs. Ezra suggests he might have been the good-luck charm.

Back in September, I interviewed Ezra in his spacious corner office in the Ogilvie Transportation Center in downtown Chicago. Just appointed to the job, the veteran political operative – Ezra had been Israel's point man dealing with the U.S. Congress – said he hoped to somehow help the Cubs get over the hump. He purposely made a transition in the chat to make this point:

"If the Cubs win the World Series," he said, "I want it to be noted it happened in my first year as the consul general...against (the curse of) the billy goat."

Wish granted. The other night, at a reception honoring Ezra and fellow newly-arrived Israeli diplomats in Chicago, he crowed his joy instead of eating crow had the Cubs fallen short.

"It's not only that I am proud of it," Ezra said with a big smile, "but I was under the direct instruction of the prime minister of Israel to take care of the curse of billy the goat. That's a check right there."



Aviv Ezra desired a Cubs World Series title to mark his arrival in Chicago – and got his wish.

But wasn't Ezra slightly agitated after Joe Maddon almost screwed up Game 7 of the World Series?

"That's when I was really sweating," he said. "But then I remember, in Jerusalem, it's a local call 'upstairs.' We're taking care of it."

Being consul general has its privileges. Ezra and Ron Dermer, Israel's ambassador to the U.S., got a personal tour of Wrigley Field late in the season from Cubs community relations impresario Mike Lufrano, one of the team's few Jewish front-office types. Ezra was impressed by the cozy history augmented by modern doodads.

"The Cubs are the most Jewish team ever," Ezra said. They suffered for so many years and finally made it to the Promised Land."