



Reign Men taps into a compelling oral history of Game 7 in the 2016 World Series.

Talking Cubs heads all top CSN Chicago producers need in riveting 'Reign Men'

*By George Castle, CBM Historian
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Some of the most riveting TV can be a bunch of talking heads.

The best example is enjoying multiple airings on CSN Chicago, the first at 9:30 p.m. Monday, March 27. When a one-hour documentary combines Theo Epstein and his Merry Men of Wrigley Field, who can talk as good a game as they play, with the video skills of world-class producers Sarah Lauch and Ryan McGuffey, you have a must-watch production.

We all know “what” happened in the Game 7 Cubs victory of the 2016 World Series that turned from potentially the most catastrophic loss in franchise history into its most memorable triumph in just a few minutes in Cleveland. Now, thanks to the sublime reporting and editing skills of Lauch and McGuffey, we now have the “how” and “why” through the oral history contained in “Reign Men: The Story Behind Game 7 of the 2016 World Series.”

Anyone with sense is tired of the endless shots of the 35-and-under bar crowd whooping it up for top sports events. The word here is gratuitous. “Reign Men” largely eschews those images and other “color” shots in favor of telling the story.

And what a tale to tell. Lauch and McGuffey, who have a combined 20 sports Emmy Awards in hand for their labors, could have simply done a rehash of what many term the greatest Game 7 in World Series history. But that would be below their standards. The finished product of “Reign Men” breaks new ground in providing perspective not previously published or broadcast on the Cubs’ championship.

For instance, the common perception was Joe Maddon suddenly evolved into a Mad Hatter or the Ghost of Leo Durocher in his strange handling of pitchers in Games 6 and 7. Specifically, final-game starter Kyle Hendricks was hit from all sides all off-season with questions over why Maddon yanked him with two out in the fifth and the game seemingly in firm control.

Lauch and McGuffey, though, get Cubs bossman Epstein – who comes off as the star interview of “Reign Men” – to reveal his pre-game talk with Maddon. Epstein said he thought NL ERA leader Hendricks would go six or seven innings. Maddon projected just five, to be ideally succeeded by Jon Lester and finally closer Aroldis Chapman. So although the revelation doesn’t suddenly make Maddon’s decisions defensible, it does display he did not pull the Hendricks departure out of left field or places where the sun doesn’t shine.

Maddon does not escape further questioning when Chapman’s 137 pitches in the World Series, most by a reliever in 30 years, are mentioned.

Also striking was Epstein’s admission he was nervous David Ross, Lester’s personal catcher, would be a batterymate with Chapman.



Cubs boss Theo Epstein has several revelations about Game 7 strategy and his emotional state as an early lead melted away.

Curse comes alive for Epstein and Co.

But the most astounding segment of “Reign Men” was the admission by Epstein and others that the Cubs’ so-called Curse, all the largely media-created hubris that went with the record 108-year-old championship drought, reared its ugly head in their souls when Rajai Davis’ eighth-inning homer off Chapman had wiped out an early 5-1 lead.

“You’re aware of the narrative,” Epstein said. “It fits the freakin’ narrative.”

Said 2016 sports Comeback Kid Kyle Schwarber: “I almost had a heart attack.”

And out of the mouth of converted Cardinals fan Ben Zobrist, who knew full well about the crazy-quilt Chicago timeline from friends and family in his downstate Eureka hometown: “You’ve got to be kidding me. At this point in Cubs history? Is this curse for real?”

McGuffey, who was at Game 7 and in the post-game champagne-soaked clubhouse, estimated Game 7 generated at least six legitimate storylines. Thanks to the glib remembrances of his big cast, they are more than adequately covered. He was only limited by time and budget.

“Could we have done 90 minutes or two hours? For sure,” McGuffey said. But sometimes less is more, and the McGuffey-Lauch team tightened things up neatly in a one-hour presentation.

Lester’s own discomfort and unfamiliarity with bullpen routine was one story brought to light in “Reign Man.”

“You can’t leave that stuff out,” McGuffey said, adding Davis’ homer obscured these angles in the aftermath of Game 7.

McGuffey and Lauch had the clock ticking to snare their interviews in the shortened off-season. Participants jumped on board when told they’d be strictly focusing on Game 7.

“It was like perfect, let me let my guard down,” McGuffey said.

CSN Chicago got a bunch of interviews at the Cubs Convention in mid-January. McGuffey traveled to the homes of Maddon, Lester and David Ross.

“I was in Maddon’s (Tampa) living room on a Monday,” he said, “drove to Tallahassee and got Rossi on a Wednesday and flew the morning of to Atlanta to get Lester, and was back on the ground (in Chicago) at 5:30 that night.”

Heyward the final, crucial ‘get’

However, the crew still lacked Jason Heyward, convener of the key rain-delay team meeting that fired up the Cubs, going into spring training. The right fielder had spent the off-season in Arizona trying to iron out his broken swing.

“You can’t do a documentary without Heyward,” said Lauch.

But the upstanding Heyward agreed to do the interview to complete the narrative.

Veterans of well-received documentaries covering the Bartman Game in 2003 and the White Sox World Series triumph in 2005, McGuffey and Lauch wondered for years how they would handle sports’ Final Frontier in a Cubs title.

“We always talked about what would happen if this moment happened,” Lauch said. “It was actually more understated than I thought. I thought the city would explode and it helps it happened (in Cleveland).”

A Cubs World Series title in, say, 1969 or 1984, would have been far more raucous. Those past times would have engendered likely civil disorder in celebration. Certainly in ‘69 the Left Field Bleacher Bums would have been joined by thousands in literally tearing apart Wrigley Field.

Both McGuffey and Lauch agree the Cubs victory was the greatest Game 7 in World Series history. So do many other pundits and fans. I’ll be disagreeable and state the see-saw Game 7 of the 1960 World Series, won by non-sluggger Bill Mazaroski with a walk-off homer in the ninth, has the edge as the all-time best. And if anyone wants to elevate Game 7 in 2016 to the greatest Fall Classic game, period, then you have to fight me on Game 6 of the 1975 World Series with twists and turns ending in Carlton Fisk’s 12th-inning body English walk-off.



Jason Heyward, who called the pivotal players meeting in Game 7, was the final, key interview of Reign Men.

Game 7 in 2016 was good enough. The producers saved their visual style points for start and finish. “Reign Men” has an opening scene of raindrops inundating a small area, emblematic of the rain delay that turned around the Cubs’ fortunes. And the show ends not with the bar crowd whooping it up, but with home video of fans bouncing off their living-room walls celebrating. CSN Chicago had solicited the videos by a social-media alert. Those smaller, but wild, celebrations seem more legitimate than the tiresome shots of well-lubricated Millennials jumping around in a bar.



Kris Bryant, who made the assist for the final out of Game 7, shares his memories for the CSN Chicago crew.

CSN will also re-air “Reign Men” at 7 p.m. March 30, 9:30 p.m. April 8, 5 p.m. April 13, 7 p.m. April 20 and 3:30 p.m. April 23.

In addition, fans on Twitter are urged to follow [@CSNOriginal](https://twitter.com/CSNOriginal) for the latest “Reign Men” updates and exclusive preview clips leading up to the March 27 premiere. Fans can also get interactive prior to and during the premiere airing with their Game 7 thoughts, memories and comments by utilizing the Twitter hashtag [#CSNReignMen](https://twitter.com/CSNReignMen).

Viewers are further urged to visit a special, dedicated CSNChicago.com “Reign Men” section at CSNChicago.com/Reign-Men, which will include video footage from the television version of “Reign Men” and web-exclusive” video excerpts not shown on TV.

CSNChicago.com will provide the full documentary trailer, a photo gallery, a social media portal, special “Cubs Talk” podcasts and original “Reign Men” commentary write-ups via CSNChicago.com’s Cubs “Insider” Patrick Mooney.

As usual, McGuffey and Lauch have covered all the bases in “Reign Men,” just like their interview subjects.

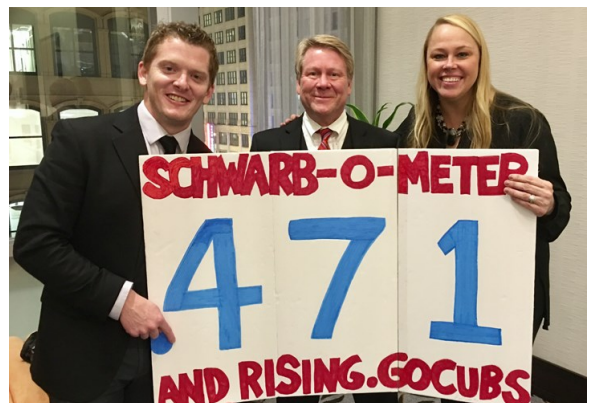
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CBM president’s take on ‘Reign Men’

*By Dr. David J. Fletcher,
CBM President*

I was honored to attend at the Wit Hotel in downtown Chicago the special VIP Premiere Screening of “Reign Men,” in which [@CSNChicago](https://twitter.com/CSNChicago) film producers Sarah Lauch and Ryan McGuffey brilliantly tell the inside story of the Cubs historic extra-inning Game 7 win in the 2016 World Series that ended 108 years of futility.

Country singer Brett Eldredge (the pride of Paris, Ill.) skillfully and understatedly



Reign Men producers Ryan McGuffey (left) and Sarah Lauch flank CBM President Dr. David J. Fletcher with the “Schwarb-O-Meter sign that was displayed during Game 7 in Cleveland.

narrates the tightly-written story of Game 7, considered by many baseball historians the best game ever in World Series history.

Lauch and McGuffey craft a Rocky-esque film that features Game 7 footage of key moments along with reflections and insights from the “Reign Men” themselves: Kris Bryant, Anthony Rizzo, Joe Maddon, Ben Zobrist, Kyle Schwarber, John Lester, David Ross, Jed Hoyer, Kyle Hendricks, Ben Zobrist, Miguel Montero, Tom Ricketts and Theo Epstein. The producers just let the “Reign Men” tell the story and stay out of the way without cluttering up the story-line with extraneous footage.

“Reign Men” is Game 7 only. That focus makes “Reign Men” special in contrast to other Cubs-related World Series documentaries that are quite lame compared to this engaging tale of roller-coaster highs and lows.

I am unaware of any other baseball film event that featured just Game 7 except for the 1960 World Series. Kinescope footage of the NBC-TV broadcast with Mel Allen had been “lost” for 50 years before it was found among the personal archives of Bing Crosby, who was a part owner of the 1960 Pirates. Crosby had ordered the game recorded for his benefit for replay later. A nervous fan, Crosby traveled to Paris, France so he would not be able to watch the game live in those pre-satellite days.

There was a special showing of the footage in Pittsburgh in Oct. 2010 close to the 50th anniversary of the Bill Mazeroski-decided classic. Many of the ‘60 Pirates in the audience told their stories about Game 7, much like the format of “Reign Men”

To help set the mood for this special showing I brought along the Schwarb-O-Meter, thanks to creator David Cihla from Game 7 [#SchwarbOMeter](#) right after Schwarber’s 10th inning hit ignites [@Cubs](#) rally. Schwarber’s finished the World Series with a .471 slugging percentage after the shocking the world with his comeback that I had predicted in May 2016. Almost all medical experts predicted Schwarber would be sidelined until 2017 after devastating injuries to his left knee in the third game in 2016.

[@kschwarb12](#) tells the story about leading off the 10th inning right after Jason Heyward’s player-only meeting in the visiting players weight room during the most famous 17- minute rain delay in baseball history that inspires the film title.

Sarah and Ryan had already distinguished themselves with “5 Outs” (the story of the Bartman game in 2013) and “Believe” (the story of the 2005 White Sox World Series Championship). I predict that they will again go to Cooperstown to show off their impressive film for the annual baseball-themed film fest.

[@CSNOriginal](#) [#CSNReignMen](#): The story of the extra-inning [#WorldSeries](#) Game 7 [@Cubs](#) win premieres March 27 at 9:30 p.m. on [@CSNChicago](#). Make sure you see this film!