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This bestselling, highly-acclaimed account is a hilarious but scathing baseball tell-all. After being voted the 1977 American League Cy Young Award winner, Sparky Lyle was rewarded for his efforts by being benched. The Yankees, a leader of free agency, signed Goose Gossage as their closer. Things only went downhill from there and the 1978 season turned out to be one of controversy, firings, fights and acrimony. In short, it was a zoo.

The Bronx Zoo: The Astonishing Inside Story of the 1978 World Champion New York Yankees Details

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Harold Kasselman says

The book is essentially a diary of the 1978 dream season of the Yankees and the disappointing role Sparky Lyle played on that team after Goose Gossage arrived. I enjoyed the book largely because of the the circus atmosphere generated by that team's "chemistry" and their inimitable owner. The diary really captures the personalities of some of the key players of the zoo clubhouse. I came away detesting Mickey Rivers , Reggie Jackson, and George Steinbrenner(But that merely confirmed my opinion of the latter two.). I also came away with a deep appreciation of just how hard it is for a manager to do his job with players who make mega bucks, consider themselves as prima donnas, and who believe they are bigger than the game or its rules and customs. And that was 1978! I can only imagine what it's like now when players are making 25 million a year or more in many cases. It's no wonder Billy Martin had a breakdown and was an alcoholic(I know he had the problem in the 50's too).

What I did not like was the constant, repetitive, obnoxious, and self centered obsessing by Lyle over every conceivable perceived slight to him by ownership, players, and fans. Suck it up-you signed a contract and then you want more. Well you got more. Then you bitched because you weren't used in the right role. Then you would rather have less money to play more. What about caring for the team and team loyalty? I sure hope that after 35 years, if you have reread this book, you will see how immature and selfish you were in 1978. Perhaps you can redeem yourself with a new version that has a longer epilogue.

Scott Colan says

This is not my son's Yankees with the core four. This is a Yankee team with multiple personalities. Reggie Jackson, Thurman Munson and Roy White, all with extreme differences in personalities. Reggie Jackson being the first coming of A-Rod. Always looking for attention. Mickey Rivers, playing his hardest when he felt like it and Thurman playing through pain.

The real story here though is how the 1977 cy young award winner was put on the back burner by George Steinbrenner. How George ran this team through his managers, first Billy Martin then Bob Lemon. How, as the year goes on, and Sparky Lyles non-use, became the reason for this book. Sparky gets back at George Steinbrenner by writing this book. By signing Goose Gossage it wrote the epitaph of Sparky's final year as a Yankee. How he loved playing with these guys but loathed playing for Steinbrenner.

These were my Yankees, but as a 10 year old i wore rose colored glasses. Things are not always peaches and cream.

Jason says

First off, I'm a baseball fan, not a Yankee fan. I found the book interesting with some funny bits and stories but that's about it. Not a page-turner.

Jacob Blanck says

I'm a big Yankee fan and I will like to tell you that this book is an awesome read. This includes all the Yankees games from 1978 day by day. Sparky "a good pitcher" made this book a good read for baseball freaks. It was a year after Reggie had bombed 3 home runs to lead the Yankees to a World Series victory in 1977. 1978 made another victory for them. Many of these diaries are interesting like how Billy Martin got fired that year and just a few days later on Old Timers Day, He was going to return as a manager in 1980 (He actually returned a following year later).

That is the book you want to read! Good enough to say.

Michael Lisk says

Fun book. Not just for Yankees fans.

Tom Stamper says

Sparky's book on the Yankees 1978 season is a forgotten classic. Like Ball Four, Bronx Zoo is funny and insightful about struggling as a major league baseball player. The main difference is the Sparky is one of the gang so his comments aren't from the snarky outsider that overpowered Bouton's book. This is a star on a world championship team with appreciation for most of his teammates.

The first plus is that Lyle is observant and understands the game. He appreciates key players Munson, Chambliss, and Randolph. He tolerates quirky guys like Rivers who he understands are essential to the team. But he doesn't mind pointing out the foibles of Reggie Jackson. He gladly does so. But he is not above praising Jackson when he starts to hit. He just wishes Jackson could learn to talk less. What he likes about Billy Martin is that Billy treats his players like men. By the end of the season with Martin gone in favor of Bob Lemon, Sparky says that Billy is the reason the team can win, although he's not knocking Lemon. He likes Lemon. And he doesn't always like Martin, but he understands enough about baseball to put aside his irritations to evaluate the situation.

While it's a known fact that Sparky Lyle taught Ron Guidry the slider that turned Guidry into a Cy Young winner in 1978, Lyle downplays his involvement saying he may have given some instructions, but all pitchers really have to learn it on their own. He is proud of Guidry early in the season and then in awe of him. He reports two of Graig Nettles classic comments, about being a kid and wanting to join the circus and play professional baseball, and getting to do both with the Yankees. Of the Sparky Lyle situation he says that Lyle went from Cy Young to Sayonara. He is full of praise for Nettles as a hitter and third baseman. He recounts a game where Nettles says he is going to hit the ball over a sign a fan puts up in right field. He does so. Then he hits a homer later in the season and tells Paul Blair he will hit another one in the game and does that also.

Bucky Dent missed something like 40 games during the season and he was often pinch hit for. But with Randolph down Bucky was the guy hitting with 2 on in the 7th inning of the playoff game against Boston.

The first pitch is a slider that Dent fouls off his foot. Dent hobbles around and tells the third base coach if Boston pitcher Mike Torrez throws that again he is putting it in the net. Torrez does and then Dent does. The Yankees win that game and then the World Series, which is just an epilogue in the book.

The tone of the book is that of an irritated and funny veteran who had the time to think about the game because he wasn't playing enough. The narration on audible is done by Sparky himself and he is great at it. I wish he had written a book for every year he spent in the majors.

I gave a book report on this in the 10th grade and the kids in class laughed quite a bit. A few even came up afterwards to offer praise. I thought I was so funny. And now reading it again I can see how easy it would have been to describe Lyle's practical jokes and bring the house down. The book is that well done.

B says

There's a series of stories that everyone likes to tell The Reggie-George-Billy triangle. The George craziness. The Bucky Dent homerun.

Here, probably the most exciting part is Lyle's perspective. The problem is that Lyle is a real whiner in this book. And not in a real consistent way. I think you could find opposing whines throughout. So it's got this kind of "You Know Me, Al" feel to it.

Probably his three biggest are:

- (1) He is only pitching badly because he's not pitching enough. So under his theory the worst players should play more often. OK, right?
- (2) He wants more money because other players were getting more money. At several phases of free agency the new contracts severely outweighed the existing contracts. It's hard to make this equitable and this is an understandable complaint. Although I generally have no problem with players demanding more money I don't like midcontract negotiations. Owners should not feel free to do so either. So this isn't amazingly sympathetic.
- (3) Reggie Jackson is bad and everyone should hate him. This reminds of the A-Rod stuff today. I thought the stats would be a little clearer on this. Like I imagined Reggie Jackson would be worth 5-6 WAR because he was a HOF'er. But he was only 3.5 wins in 139 games. Lou Piniella was 3.7 wins in 130 games. Reggie was fourth among hitters. So, you know, not the best. But Lyle also touts guys like Roy White (0.8 WAR in 103 games)

It's especially tough when, you know, Sparky Lyle 0.4 bWAR in 111.2 IP.

Anyway, this is a real argument for some kind of intangible grit and team chemistry. I'm not sure it pulls it off because it's kind of incoherent as an argument. By contrast, Jim Bouton, for instance, has a specific goal/perspective: "You wouldn't believe how these guys are all not heroes at all." But kind of interesting as a different perspective.

<http://www.baseball-reference.com/tea...>

Chris Mauger says

Let me start by saying that the 1978 Yankees are my favorite baseball team ever. I was 13 in 1978, and these guys were my heroes. I read this book when it first came out in 1979, and loved it. Sparky was the "good guy", Reggie and George were the "bad guys." But now, reading it as an adult, Sparky was no hero either. Leaving the stadium during a game without permission, showing up late for spring training, certainly not the hero I'd seen him as in my youth.

That being said, his humor is engaging and he certainly pulls no punches. As a nice counterpoint to this book, I'd recommend Roger Kahn's "October Men" which an unbiased observers take on the '78 Yankees (and done by an accomplished author).

John Spero says

I read this book when I was 11, and it was the first book to give me an idea of what it meant to be a man.

Spiros says

Another (chronologically, the first) first person account of the madness that was Yankee Baseball in the early part of the Steinbrenner Era. A fraught season with a glorious (unless you happened to be, like me, a Bosox fan) ending, the season marked the swan song of Sparky Lyle's Yankee's career; the Boss went on one of free agent buying sprees, during which he acquired Rich "Goose" Gossage, which in the words of fellow Steinbrenner sufferer Graig "Puff" Nettles, relegated Sparky "from Cy Young to sayonara". Buried in the depths of the Yankees' pen, Lyle had a front row seat for the insanity that was the Yankees' clubhouse. Between Steinbrenner, Billy Martin, and Reggie Jackson, the inmates were definitely running the asylum, with ample support from such colorful characters as Mickey Rivers, "Sweet" Lou Pinella (not so sweet when he made too many outs), Cliff Johnson, Catfish Hunter, and of course Lyle himself, who, by his own account, spent the entire season in a prolonged snit after Gossage joined the club. He even went so far as to walk from the team on at least one occasion; unlike Bill Lee, who left the Red Sox to protest the trading of Bernie Carbo, and later staged a career-ending walk-out to protest the release of Rodney Scott from the Expos, Sparky walked to protest his own demotion from closer to mop-up man.

Although he might not come across in this narrative as being especially eloquent (his contribution to my word-hoard will consist entirely in the phrase "that's church" to indicate finality), Sparky is no dummy: he put his finger on what would become the problem with Steinbrenner's "fix-it-now" philosophy of personnel management, and which would cause the Bombers to wander in the wilderness from 1981 through 1994. The Boss had no patience for developing a farm system, preferring to pursue flashy free agents. However, Sparky is hardly infallible; this is what he has to say about Bobby Bonds: "Bobby is going to get traded forever because for all his power, he can't hit in the fourth spot. He strikes out too much, so the manager always ends up leading him off 'cause you gotta get him out of the way as quick as you can. Let him do his damage, if he's going to do any, and that's it. When we had him here in New York, we were expecting great things of him, but the next thing you know, he was leading off. I mean the guy was hitting 30 home runs and he was leading off!" This is reminiscent of Buddy Ryan's idiotic critique of Anthony Carter: "All he does is score touchdowns!" When Bonds was allowed to be a lead-off hitter, he was one of the best in the Majors, all those strikeouts notwithstanding: all he did was score runs. The fact that a bunch of dunker-headed managers spent the middle '70's trying to turn him into a cleanup batter was hardly Bonds' fault.

Michael Kallan says

One of my favorite books ever; probably have read it ten times over the last 30+ years. 1978 was the first year I was really into baseball for the whole season, and at that time I was a big Yankees fan. It turned out to be a memorable season full of larger than life personalities, with the Yankees making up a 14 game deficit to the Red Sox in July, taking the division lead in September, watching Boston come back to tie them on the last game of the regular season, and it culminating in a 1 game playoff in game 163 at Fenway Park on a Monday afternoon. It was Rosh Hashanah that day, so I was able to watch the playoff game instead of being in my second grade class.

Reading the book brings me back to that season, and learning about the personalities and how they clashed throughout the first 3 1/2 months, and yet finally meshed late in the year leading to the climatic comeback and eventual world championship. As a seven year old, I never imagined any of what the book described beyond the actual game action.

Lyle (with help from his co-author Peter Golenbock) tells one hilarious story after another from his long career, yet you can see how he is struggling with his fall from closer to glorifies mop-up man (he won the 1977 Cy Young award, but was more or less replaced in the closer role by free agent signee Goose Gossage during the 1978 season). The book is not written on the level of a David Halberstam novel, but it has a wonderful flow and brings me back to some wonderful memories of my youth. My late grandfather took me to my first two major league games that summer (Pirates vs. Mets @ Shea Stadium in June, then A's vs. Yankees @ Yankee Stadium that August). Every couple of years I pick it up anew and get transported back to my childhood...

Tom Buske says

A look at the turbulent 1978 NY Yankees team from the point of view of one of it's players, Sparky Lyle,, the book is in diary form much like the earlier "Ball Four". Lyle doesn't always come across as positive or a team player, but there are numerous humorous anecdotes that make this book a very enjoyable read if you are a baseball fan.

M. Milner says

1978 was a pretty great year for baseball, especially in New York. The Yankees, down by 14 games in July, roared back and took the AL East pennant in a one-game playoff against Boston. Anyway, if you're a baseball fan, you probably have some knowledge of that. And here, in The Bronx Zoo, is the other side of that season: what happened off the field, away from the cameras and inside the clubhouse.

Lyle's book is a wild read, ranging from raunchy clubhouse tales to keen observation. He'll go from a story about sitting on a cake to pointing out why his pitches aren't working, sometimes even in the same paragraph. Written as a diary breaking down the season day-by-day (think Ball Four), the season seems to take forever sometimes as losses mount and drama in the front office keeps mounting between Billy Martin and George Steinbrenner, both of whom come off as high-strung, insecure and made for each other. The

team is packed with personality, too: between the sensitive, and quiet Thurman Munson and the bombastic, publicity-loving Reggie Jackson, this Yankee team just drips with colourful characters. Jackson really steals it as the prototypical 21st Century superstar, always happy to give a sharp quip into the microphone, even if it's less than truthful ("You guys heard that?" he asks the assembled media after one scathing comment on a radio broadcast, "if I'd known you were listening I'd have said something different.")

There are the occasional flashes of insight between the day-to-day: Lyle occasionally explains why a pitcher's pitches aren't working, the little ways a fielder is making great plays and at the little differences made by a team on a hot streak; there's also the occasional show of casual ballplayer misogyny, too. And while he's never removed from the shenanigans in the clubhouse, he's something of a bemused observer, cataloging the pranks, off-hand comments and tension on one of the most memorable seasons in baseball. Recommended, especially for Yankee fans.

Lisa Kilbride says

The same format as Ball Four, but not as happy a ball player, which made for difficult reading. Very glad he got traded to Texas, and hope he was happier there.

Tom Gase says

I've read a lot of books about the 1978 season, either from the Yankees side or the Red Sox side but couldn't remember reading one that had been told by a player (with help from Peter Golenbock) so this was refreshing. Sparky Lyle was the Cy Young award winner of the 1977 season and is the author of this book. After winning the 1977 Cy Young the Yankees go out and get Goose Gossage for the bullpen, basically putting Lyle out of the closer role even after winning the Cy Young. Lyle chronicles that plus the highly chaotic year the 1978 Yankees had. On its way to winning their second straight World Series, but this one in more dramatic fashion, the Yankees were constantly fighting with Manager Billy Martin, especially Reggie Jackson. The more I read about Reggie Jackson over the years the more I dislike him. Total hot dog of a player that was kind of a crybaby. This doesn't come just from this book. This is about the fifth book I've read to portray him this way. Also interesting stories on Martin, Steinbrenner, Gossage, Thurman Munson, Mickey Rivers (another crybaby), Craig Nettles, Lou Pinella, Cliff Johnson (a big crybaby), Willie Randolph, Catfish Hunter, Ron Guidry and countless others including a Yankee player you can't say the name of in Boston since October of 1978. Good stuff but Lyle comes off as a crybaby at times too, so I didn't like the book as much because of that. I liked Peter Golenbock's "Bums" a little more and of the 1978 books I've read this one falls somewhere in the middle.
