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*The Tigers and Yankees in '61: A Pennant Race for the Ages,
the Babe's Record Broken and Stormin' Norman's Greatest
Season* by Jim Sargent (review)

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NINE: A Journal of Baseball History and Culture, Volume 24, Numbers 1-2,
Fall-Spring 2015-16, pp. 203-205 (Review)

Published by University of Nebraska Press
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/nin.2015.0047>



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Jim Sargent. *The Tigers and Yankees in '61: A Pennant Race for the Ages, the Babe's Record Broken and Stormin' Norman's Greatest Season.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2016. 250 pp. Paper, \$35.

Jan Finkel

Readers familiar with Jim Sargent's work on the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League and the Detroit Tigers will cheer his latest offering, an enjoyable chronicle of one of baseball's most extraordinary seasons.

Sargent notes that a major reason for writing *The Tigers and Yankees in '61* was to correct the perception of 1961 as the property of the aristocratic Yankees. Replete with charismatic players like Mickey Mantle, Yogi Berra, and Whitey Ford, along with the private, reticent Roger Maris, they ran away with the American League pennant and the World Series. Recording the feats and personalities of those Yankees (and countless others from almost every decade of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries) has become something of an industry. A first-rate team in their own right, the Tigers with future Hall of Famers Al Kaline and Jim Bunning, popular slugger Rocky Colavito, Frank "Yankee Killer" Lary, and the surprisingly emergent Norm Cash, have received short shrift. One of only three American League teams—the 1915 Tigers and 1954 Yankees—before 1969 to win 100 or more games and not win the pennant, their story deserves telling.

Inherent in any chronicle of a baseball season is a trap. There is no suspense; everybody knows how the season turned out. Because the games are the thing, many have to receive mention, some in considerable detail. The majority of games are pretty routine—no towering walk-off home runs, brilliant pitching, miraculous catches, and so on. Routine isn't all that fascinating, and a plethora of game summaries gets boring fast. In addition, play-by-play game summaries, along with daily standings, players' game logs, and transactions are readily available at Baseball-Reference, Retrosheet, and elsewhere, enabling the reader to find the bare bones of the events of any given day. Sargent eludes the trap by keeping the sections of his chapters short and by interspersing vignettes throughout. The reader finds illuminating discussions of Mickey Mantle and Al Kaline, Whitey Ford and Frank Lary, new managers Ralph Houk and Bob Scheffing, spring training in St. Petersburg (Yankees) and Lakeland (Tigers), and so on.

Both teams started the season with rookie managers although for different reasons. The Yankees were mad, having fallen to the upstart Pittsburgh Pirates in the previous World Series, a championship (and checks from which) they'd come to see as their birthright. Casey Stengel, despite ten pennants and seven World Series titles, was vulnerable, disliked by more than a few players

and losing control of the team. The loss to the Pirates gave the front office the opportunity they'd been looking for: Out with Stengel, in with Ralph Houk. Conversely, the Tigers would gladly have traded places with the Yankees. Buried in mediocrity since 1950, they had finished sixth in 1960 while going through managers Jimmy Dykes, Billy Hitchcock (one game), and Joe Gordon. Dumping Gordon, the Tigers brought in Bob Scheffing.

Houk and Scheffing began their jobs the same way, each sitting down with his biggest star. Mantle was coming off two sub-par (for him) seasons, and Houk told him he was better than he'd been and had to do more to lead the team by example. Kaline, having moved to center field to make room for the slow-footed Colavito in right, had suffered through his worst season since his rookie year. Scheffing told him about the same thing Houk had told Mantle. The simple moves paid huge dividends.

After chronicling spring training, Sargent moves through the season month by month. He describes briefly in April the complicated expansion of the American League from eight teams (as it had been for 60 years) to ten, and begins discussion of the new season. "The Tigers take the league lead in May. Both teams play well in June. The Tigers and Yankees move in and out of the lead in July and keep battling in August. The Yankees take control in September, sweeping the Tigers in New York over Labor Day weekend. They storm their way to 109 wins and rout the Cincinnati Reds in the World Series. The Tigers, playing for pride, finish with 101 wins." Sargent's concluding chapter brings everything together neatly.

People made up the games and season, and they get full treatment in Sargent's telling. Maris and Mantle battled over the home run lead, Maris hitting sixty-one to break Babe Ruth's thirty-four-year-old record of sixty as an injured Mantle pulled up lame and settled for fifty-four. The much-maligned Maris held the Major League record until 1998, when Mark McGwire sent seventy out of the park. Norm Cash led the majors with a .361 average and added forty-one homers and 132 RBIs. Whitey Ford and Frank Lary won career-best twenty-five and twenty-three games, respectively. The Yankees hit 240 home runs to set a new team record; the Tigers, hardly banjo hitters themselves, hit 180 and led the league in runs scored. Quite a season was 1961.

Sargent admirably manages a welter of material. He tells a consistently engrossing story in lively prose. In addition, he provides photographs of the main characters, many of those of the Tigers coming from his private collection.

Anyone interested in baseball in the early 1960s—especially those of us fortunate enough to have experienced it—will enjoy *The Tigers and Yankees in '61*.



Krister Swanson. *Baseball's Power Shift: How the Players, the Fans, and the Media Changed American Sports Culture.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016. 281 pp. Cloth, \$29.95.

Jordan Max-Ryan Englekirk

The image of men, surrounded by smiling agents and GMs, as they sign two hundred million dollar contracts has recently been the popular depiction of baseball player. It is easy to forget that free agency and the ability for players to make maximum dollars is a relatively new phenomenon. In *Baseball's Power Shift: How the Players, the Fans, and the Media Changed American Sports Culture*, Krister Swanson takes a look at the history of this change. Historian Swanson places ballplayers into a larger context, arguing that it was difficult for baseball players to convince the fans that they needed union protection. He argues that baseball players were seen by the public as living the life of luxury and glamor and were lucky to be able to be where they are. Swanson states that “players needed to appeal to their public’s sense of freedom, liberty, and capitalistic impulses, all without threatening the romantic traditions of the game and the business of baseball” (xv). As a result, Swanson argues, unionization fundamentally changed the game of baseball. It was through their union that the players finally destroyed the reserve clause, won the right to free agency, thus changing the image of the game for fans from one of tradition to one of a business.

To support these points, Swanson examines the history of the labor movement in Major League Baseball. In the first few chapters, Swanson gives an overview of the history of player unionization. He traces the failed tries and the sometimes extremes means that the owners took to fight back against any attempts from players to unionize. He then looks at the role of television and the impact that it had on revenues. He examines how the players wanted some of this revenue to start a pension plan. He looks at the resistance from owners to give in to any of the player demands. He also examines that despite the success of players such as Don Drysdale and Sandy Koufax holding out against the Dodgers and demanding higher pay—demonstrating how collective bargaining could work—players saw very little change in their pay.