



Crazy '08: How a Cast of Cranks, Rogues, Boneheads, and Magnates Created the Greatest Year in Baseball History

By Cait Murphy

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From the perspective of 2007, the unintentional irony of Chance's boast is manifest—these days, the question is when will the Cubs ever win a game they have to have. In October 1908, though, no one would have laughed: The Cubs were, without doubt, baseball's greatest team—the first dynasty of the 20th century.

Crazy '08 recounts the 1908 season—the year when Peerless Leader Frank Chance's men went toe to toe to toe with John McGraw and Christy Mathewson's New York Giants and Honus Wagner's Pittsburgh Pirates in the greatest pennant race the National League has ever seen. The American League has its own three-cornered pennant fight, and players like Cy Young, Ty Cobb, Walter Johnson, and the egregiously crooked Hal Chase ensured that the junior circuit had its moments. But it was the National League's—and the Cubs'—year.

Crazy '08, however, is not just the exciting story of a great season. It is also about the forces that created modern baseball, and the America that produced it. In 1908, crooked pols run Chicago's First Ward, and gambling magnates control the Yankees. Fans regularly invade the field to do handstands or argue with the ump's; others shoot guns from rickety grandstands prone to burning. There are anarchists on the loose and racial killings in the town that made Lincoln. On the flimsiest of pretexts, General Abner Doubleday becomes a symbol of Americanism, and baseball's own anthem, "Take Me Out to the Ballgame," is a hit.

Picaresque and dramatic, 1908 is a season in which so many weird and wonderful things happen that it is somehow unsurprising that a hairpiece, a swarm of gnats, a sudden bout of lumbago, and a disaster down in the mines all play a role in its outcome. And sometimes the events are not so wonderful at all. There are several deaths by baseball, and the shadow of corruption creeps closer to the heart of baseball—the honesty of the game itself. Simply put, 1908 is the year that baseball grew up.

Oh, and it was the last time the Cubs won the World Series.

Destined to be as memorable as the season it documents, *Crazy '08* sets a new standard for what a book about baseball can be.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. It's been almost a century since the loopy shenanigans of 1908 that produced what *Fortune* magazine editor Cait Murphy calls "the year that baseball comes of age," but the resultant drama has hardly faded with time. Although baseball books tend to sag with nostalgia, Murphy's wisecracking yarn digs right into the era's brawling, vivid ugliness with little regard for such niceties, and is all the better for it. Her book is so rife with corruption, greed, stupidity and downright weirdness that it makes today's sport of sanctimony and clean behavior look positively sleepy in comparison. This isn't surprising, given that 1908 was not just the last year that the shockingly victorious Chicago Cubs made it to the World Series, but also the year when a game would be called a tie through sheer Rashomon-like confusion and when a game day riot would take the lives of two people. The titanic matches between the rival Cubs and New York Giants are thrilling enough, but what really makes Murphy's book an addictive pleasure is the joy the author takes in the colorful asides where she fills in the chaotic blanks of an America discovering not just the joy of its national pastime but its very character. (*Mar.*)

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review Fans knew they were seeing the end of a marvelous season when they watched the Cubs claim the National League pennant by defeating the New York Giants on October 8, 1908. But with the advantage of historical perspective, Murphy recognizes that the '08 fans actually witnessed baseball's decisive turn toward modernity. In a tale peopled with colorful characters--including the regal Christy Mathewson and the boozy Hal Chase--Murphy unfolds the formative events of this frenetic year. Readers will relish the infamous "Merkle game"--a game apparently won by the Giants, but later declared a tie because of a base-running blunder. Almost as riveting is the season-ending replay of the controversial tie, a replay that so aroused fans that some snuck into the game through the sewers, and many stayed to assault the victorious visitors. A writer of exceptional verve when recounting the heroics of the diamond, Murphy evinces a shrewd intelligence when scanning the cultural forces remaking the world beyond the ballpark. She unravels the malign dynamics behind Ty Cobb's violence against blacks, and she limns the parallels between early-twentieth-century anxieties about immigrant anarchists and twenty-first-century fears of foreign terrorists. A book that will long claim the attention of serious sports enthusiasts. *Bryce Christensen*
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Review

Crazy '08 is simply a delight, required reading for all fans of baseball in Chicago. (--Chicago Tribune)

"If you are any kind of fan, you ought to relish and revel in this wonderful book" (--Washington Times)

A penetrating look at the dead-ball era, when the game truly was the national pastime. A- (--Entertainment Weekly)

"picturesque details are what make...Crazy '08 such a fun and revealing journey through the early days of baseball." (--Sports Illustrated)

"Entertaining and meticulously researched." (Wall Street Journal)

“Beguiling” (Raleigh News & Observer)

“[A] rollicking tour... will fascinate students of baseball... cause today’s Cub fans to experience an unaccustomed feeling---pride...” (New York Times Book Review)

“[W]orthy to stand alongside The Glory of Their Times..., out in front.” (Raleigh News & Observer)

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Lauren Joseph:

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Pat Billings:

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