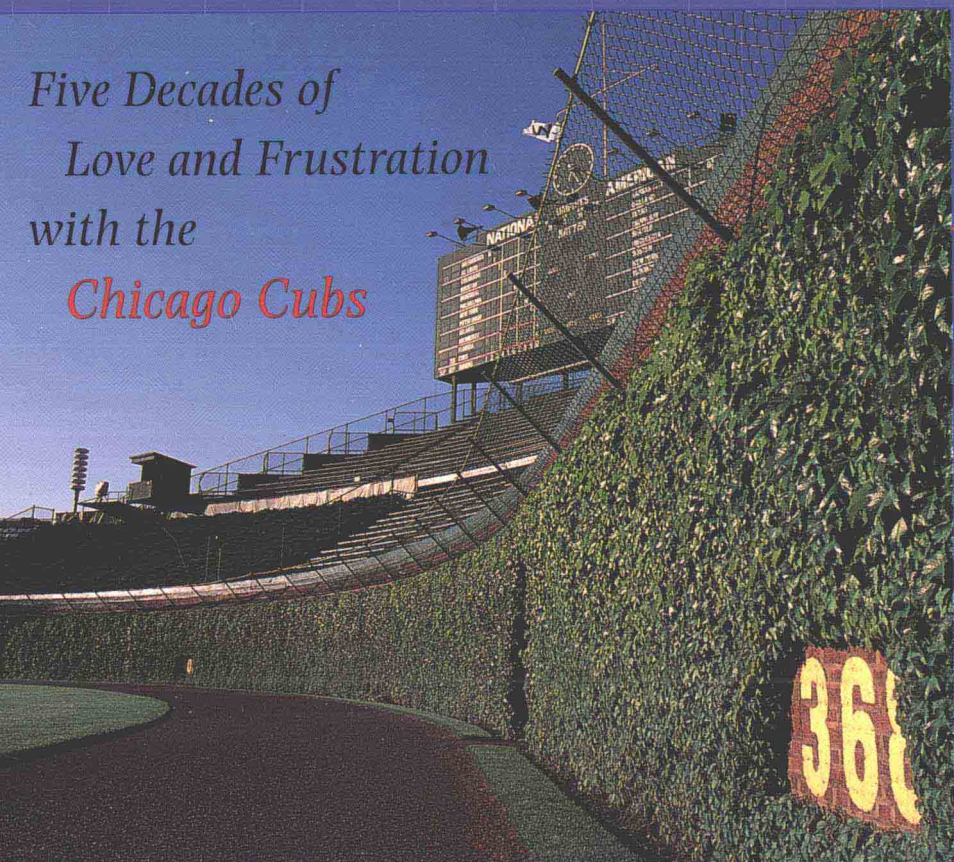


*Five Decades of
Love and Frustration
with the
Chicago Cubs*



BANKS TO SANDBERG TO GRACE

COMPILED BY CARRIE MUSKAT
FOREWORD BY BOB VERDI

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To my hero, Alan

FOREWORD

There are two ways a writer can go about this business of reporting sports. He or she can do the scores or highlights routine, and toss in a few quotations for filler. Or, one can cultivate this fertile field, unearthing insights and nuggets of news that cannot be found elsewhere and thus require extra effort. We all admire athletes who “give 100 percent” every game; I feel the same about journalists who do likewise.

Carrie Muskat belongs in the latter category, which is one reason why I was so excited to hear about her latest work, *Banks to Sandberg to Grace*. Talk about a fertile field: the Cubs have been making baseball fans laugh and cry for decades. They have had only 13 winning seasons since their last World Series appearance in 1945, but they’re forever piquing our interest—whether it’s Jose Cardenal missing part of spring training because his eyelids were stuck together or relief pitchers lighting fires they were supposed to put out.

I remember watching a game when the Cubs lost 22–0 to Pittsburgh, and the Cubs were lucky to get nothing. There was another time when I was out for a day and came home and someone said the Cubs scored 26 runs in Denver. My first question was, “Did they win?”

I can think of no other journalist better qualified to tell us all about it than Carrie. Almost without fail, in her daily dispatches,

she reports what you want to know about a game, or a person, or a situation. Moreover, she will find something that no other journalist has.

“I didn’t know that.” I can’t tell you how many times I’ve whispered that to myself after reading one of Carrie’s stories, whether she’s covering just another ballgame on a Tuesday afternoon in August or writing an extended feature from some distant dateline. I’ve been in the racket for a long time, so I respect her work ethic and her instincts. There’s a lot of stuff teams and players don’t want reporters to write, but Carrie has that knack of pursuing, whether it’s a fact she’s after or an explanation. It’s not easy, because the competition is fierce, but Carrie hits a lot of home runs.

I’m confident you’ll feel that way about this book. She has interviewed numerous Cubs, from then and now, and pulled it all together. She’s not afraid to let other people talk, and that is a gift with which some reporters are not blessed. We all ask questions, but how many of us are good listeners? Carrie has seen a lot, and what she hasn’t seen of the Cubs during the last 50 or so lean years, she’s studied and researched. She also realizes that sports are part of the entertainment industry and writes accordingly.

We read about sports because they are diversions, and while she takes her job seriously, Carrie has just the right light touch. There is no substitute for being there, and I’ve seen it in person. She arrives at the ballpark early and leaves late. I never particularly enjoyed working against her, but I know you’ll enjoy this book as much as I did. If anyone can make sense of the Cubs, it’s Carrie Muskat.

Bob Verdi

INTRODUCTION

My favorite time at Wrigley Field is early, before any fans are allowed in. It's too soon for batting practice. The grounds crew has finished raking the infield dirt smooth. The batting cage and screens are in place. Wrigley is quiet, respectful, pure. And there is anticipation in the air, because you never know what is going to happen that day. Andre Dawson could hit three home runs in consecutive at bats. The lights could come on. Kerry Wood could strike out 20.

That's why I like my job as a baseball writer. And that's part of the reason Cub fans keep coming back.

The Cubs are a franchise that has often been comically incompetent, home to sometimes-endearing characters and not a few truly great players, and tinged by racism and upper-management whimsy. A franchise that has provided brief moments of intense joy in an aura that includes a wonderful ballpark and, especially recently, fans who keep on coming despite everything. No other franchise in sports has all that.

Every time Lou Brock's name is mentioned, Cub fans cringe. How could Leon Durham miss that ground ball in '84? Why isn't Greg Maddux still a Cub? Why didn't the Cubs win the World Series in '45? How did Ernie Banks really feel about Leo Durocher? What happened in '69? What was Lee Elia thinking

when he blasted Cub fans? If Hank Sauer ran a foot race with Ralph Kiner, would anybody win?

Need answers? Read on. You will be surprised.

This is a story of the Chicago Cubs—more than a half century of failure—in the words of the very people who were so much a part of it. I interviewed more than 60 players, coaches, managers, and others, and let them talk. What you're about to read is what they said, how they said it.

All of the interviews were done exclusively for this book with the exception of Sammy Sosa's. He did not want to take part because, as he put it, "I have my own book." The material in his chapter is from a one-on-one interview conducted in August 1999.

Many thanks to all who shared their stories. Thanks also to Arlene Gill, Rebecca Polihronis, and John McDonough of the Cubs for helping me find some of these guys; to Sharon Pannozzo and Chuck Wasserstrom for always being there; to Steve Green and Steven Schwab—they know why; and to Bob Verdi for his kind words.

And, to my husband, Alan Solomon, a baseball fan, former Wrigley vendor, and still an occasional (right field) bleacher bum, thanks for your inspiration, insight, and editing skills. I couldn't have done this without you.

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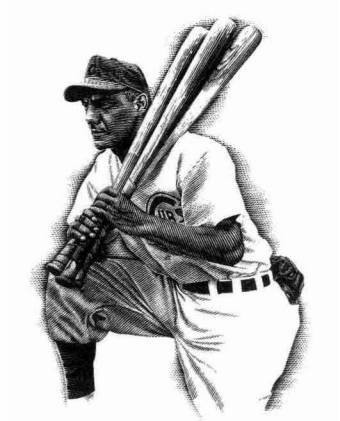
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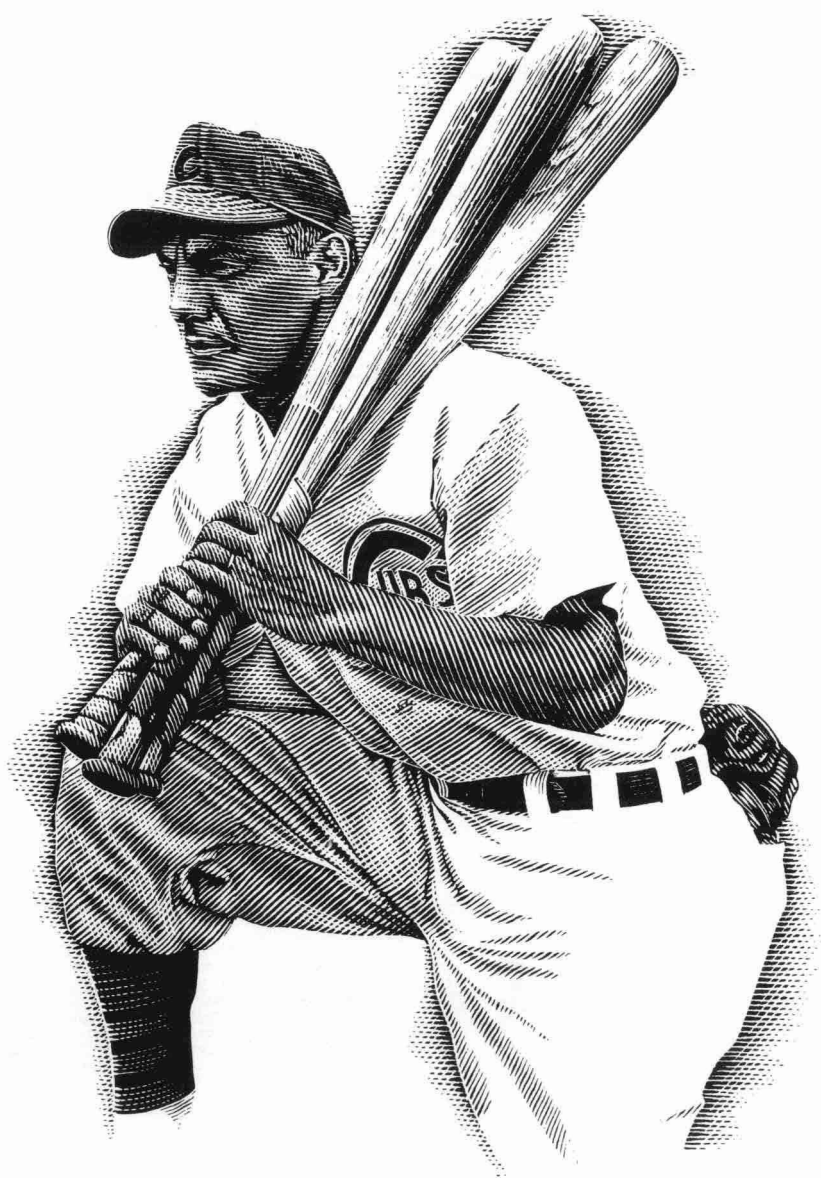


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Phil Cavarretta

A native Chicagoan, Phil Cavarretta was signed out of Lane Tech High School and played 20 years for the Cubs. His signing bonus? "I signed for a bag of peanuts," he said. The Cubs paid him \$125 a month and he sent half of that home to his Italian immigrant parents. At the age of 18, he homered in his first major league at bat, but never became a serious power hitter. Nicknamed Phillibuck, his best year was 1945 when he batted a league-leading .355 and won Most Valuable Player honors. He paced the Cubs in their seven-game World Series loss to Detroit, batting .423. Cavarretta was promoted to manager in 1951, replacing Frankie Frisch, but his honesty got the best of him. He was fired in spring training 1954 when he criticized the Cubs' chances. And today? "I sit there and second-guess the hell out of them," he says.

I came to the Cubs right out of high school. I had just two and a half months' experience in Class A and I was called up. I was blessed with ability. The good Lord says he'll put you on earth to become a professional baseball player, and he says it's going to be up to you to play hard and be successful. That's the truth. That's why I always gave 110 percent.

My parents were from Italy. They could hardly speak English. It was during the depression in '35 and I made the Cubs, and my parents were happy about it but they didn't understand baseball. When I was going to school, I played softball. I played in the yard and was sliding around and getting all dirty and my pants all torn

up. I'd come home and my dad would look at me and I'm all filthy. He'd look at me and he'd say, "Philly, where you been?"

I said, "Dad, I've been out in the schoolyard playing baseball with my friends."

He said, "Baseball? What the hell is baseball? Baseball, you forget. You go to school, learn your books."

My dad became a good baseball fan and he came out to Wrigley Field with my mom. He'd go into the office before the game, and he'd say, "My son, Phillip, he win the ballgame for the Cubs today, OK?"

My dad had a beautiful curly mustache and a big one. He had blue eyes like Frank Sinatra. He was a good-looking guy. He'd always sit there and curl the ends of his mustache up.

I played my first game and it was early in April. It was cold and there were snowflakes. I had a pretty good night. The first time up, I hit a home run. I hit for the cycle in the minors. The Cubs sent me a telegram that said, "Report to Reading, Pennsylvania," and at that time it was the Boston Red Sox farm team. I told Mr. [Clarence "Pants"] Rowland, "That's not one of our affiliates." I had a pretty good year, hit .318, .320. Being just an 18-year-old kid, I was homesick. The last game, I'm packing my bag and I get another telegram that said, "Report to the Cubs." I wanted to go home but I was happy.

I know a lot of people weren't too fond of Mr. Wrigley, but to me, he was very, very good. He was very quiet and very reserved. He looked like he was always sitting and thinking, "What move am I going to make with my gum company?" If he took a liking to you, he was your friend. He enjoyed us. He wouldn't come out and yell and all that stuff. Mrs. Wrigley, she was just the opposite. She'd come out there every day and sit in her box seat and she'd root for the Cubbies. She had a ball.

Mr. Wrigley was generous. During those days, the majority of the owners wouldn't put their money out because they weren't

drawing two, three million people. The money wasn't there. Mr. Wrigley, he took care of us pretty good. He'd give us a bonus every once in a while. He was his own man. That's it. I enjoyed him.

Favorite moment? My first game. That was the highest, most thrilling moment I ever had. I came up to the Cubs, and I picked them up in Boston and from Boston we came home to Wrigley Field. I played my first game September 25, 1934. I was just 18 years old. We were playing Cincinnati. The pitcher was Whitey Wistert—when you do something good against a guy, you remember. He had two brothers who went to the University of Michigan. Whitey was a pretty good pitcher. He, too, was a rookie. It was 0-0 going into the seventh inning. I wasn't a home run hitter. I was like Mark Grace. I hit a home run and we won 1-0. Charlie Root was our pitcher. When I became manager, he was my pitching coach, a beautiful guy and a good pitcher.

Now a year later, September 25, 1935, we're in St. Louis and we're battling the Cardinals for the pennant. This is the old Gashouse Gang. I'm talking about a good club. Dizzy Dean, Leo Durocher, Joe Medwick, Pepper Martin—they had a pretty good club. It's 0-0, same thing. We had a five-game series there. If we win the first game, we're tied for the pennant. Lon Warneke was our pitcher. Same inning, seventh inning. I hit a home run against Paul Dean. And the score was 1-0.

We clinched the pennant the next day. I think it was Charlie Root who beat Dizzy Dean. Dizzy Dean was one of my favorite guys after he went to broadcasting. He was a real funny guy. Great sense of humor.

The Cubs changed managers in the middle of the '38 season. Charlie Grimm was our manager. We were just playing average. We did have a pretty good team. We had all the players from the '35 team, which was a young, feisty bunch of guys. That team,

most people don't know it—I think it's still a record. In the month of September, we won 21 games in a row. That was pretty good. I was only 18 years old and right out of high school, and I'm in a World Series. That was the '35 team. In '38, we had the same ballclub as '35, and we weren't playing too good. Maybe we were getting a little feisty like all people do. Maybe we thought we were king of the hill. They named Gabby Hartnett, who was our catcher, the manager. Charlie, he was so good to me, he was a jolly guy all the time. He treated everybody like his own son. That was great, but I guess that kind of wore out. They hired Gabby, who was a great player and a Hall of Famer. He was tough and the opposite. That shook us up.

That's the year Gabby hit the home run in the dark and, believe me, it was dark. No lights and we had two men out, and Mace Brown was pitching for the Pirates and a super relief pitcher. He got the first two men out and he got two strikes on Gabby and a bell must have rang in his brain. He's throwing all fastballs. He must have figured Gabby couldn't see too good. He decided to throw a slider. A slider doesn't have too much velocity, and he did Gabby a favor. He did us all a favor. The ball didn't look like it was going to get high enough. I guess the good Lord said, "Let me get this thing up a few inches." I'm a strong believer in the man up above.

We went on to win the pennant in '38, and we faced a team that was unbelievable. The '38 Yankees were pretty damn good. Coming back from New York, Gabby wasn't too happy about it. We were in one of the compartments there on the train. We were allowed to play poker then. We had a few beers in there, and he found out we were in there. He knocked on the door and we opened it up; we knew who it was. He was pretty feisty. He had had a few beers, too. He read us the riot act. "You goddamn so and so, how can you go in there and celebrate? You lost four in a row." He said, "Let me tell you another thing—half you guys