My Greatest Day in Baseball, as told to John P. Carmichael. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996. $12.95 pb.

LIEB, FRED. *Baseball as I Have Known It.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996. $16 pb.

CREAMER, ROBERT W. *Stengel: His Life and Times.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996. $15 pb.

During the stretch drive of the 1952 season, Cleveland Indian manager Al Lopez unveiled a highly unorthodox strategy for overtaking the already "threepeat" Yankees of Casey Stengel. In early September, he announced that Bob Lemon, Early Wynn, and Mike Garcia would henceforth do all of the Indians pitching for the remainder of the season. When informed of his rival's plan, Stengel offered this piece of vintage Stengelese: "Well, I always heard it couldn't be done, but sometimes it don't always work." And it didn't. The Yanks held off the Indians en route to the completion of their still unprecedented "fivepeat" of 1949-1953.

But there are times when three can be enough—especially when the incomparable Stengel plays a role, whether featured, supporting, or cameo. Bison Books of the University of Nebraska Press has recently reprinted three baseball books worthy of resuscitation, each of which can stand alone, the test of time, and at least a modicum of Stengelese.

First published in 1945, John P. Carmichael's *My Greatest Day in Baseball* asked forty-seven major leaguers to recount their most memorable day in the game for a prominent baseball writer, most often the Chicago *Daily New's* John P. Carmichael himself. Fred Lieb's *Baseball as I Have Known It* dates from 1977, when its author was eighty-nine years old and yet still able to look back with a keen eye over seven decades of covering the game, mostly for the New York *Post.* The most recent entry is veteran *Sports Illustrated* writer Robert Creamer's

biography of Casey Stengel, whose career as a player and a manager also spanned nearly seven decades.

Stengel's "greatest day" as told to Carmichael took him all the way back to 1910 and his first day in the major leagues. The occasion was a game between Brooklyn and Pittsburgh in which a rookie outfielder by the name of Charles Stengel got four hits. He neglected to mention that his four hits and one walk not only was instrumental in beating the Pirates 7-3 but helped end a twelve-game Pittsburgh win streak. In his biography, Creamer is not so reticent. "Stengel the phenom" sent the writers "digging into their memories and the sparse record books for comparisons." The best recollection on the spot had it that then Pirate manager Fred Clarke had had a 5-5 debut in 1894. Others recalled the much more recent exploits of one Talbot Percy Dalton, who had managed four straight hits off Christy Mathewson earlier in 1910. By 1911, Dalton was back in the minors, never to be noticed by Fred Lieb, who became a baseball reporter for the New York *Post* that same year.

In 1911, New York baseball was ruled by the Giants of John McGraw. Not coincidentally, John McGraw appears in all three books. Stengel played for McGraw during part of the 1921 season and all of the following two campaigns. Though no longer an everyday player, he was a member of McGraw's last World Series team in 1922 against the upstart Yankees.

McGraw, according to Creamer, was Stengel's managerial idol. Ironically, McGraw and Stengel would end their respective managerial careers with ten pennants each. And no one, not even Connie Mack over the course of some fifty seasons, has ever topped them. The similarities between them end there. McGraw had his final National League win at age 51. Stengel did not capture his first Yankee pennant until he was nearly 60. McGraw never won three series in a row. Stengel, of course, took five. McGraw was often consumed, even destroyed, by defeat. Stengel handled it well. Creamer offers an explanation in the course of discussing Stengel's dealings with his own McGraw-in-training, Billy Martin. Stengel (unlike either McGraw or Martin) gradually grew accustomed to defeat—and dismissal—over many losing seasons as a big league manager. (In nine full seasons as manager of the Dodgers and the Braves, Stengel finished above .500 only once and as low as seventh five times.)

Stengel's dismal record made his selection to lead the Yankees in 1949 all the more remarkable. Creamer again suggests an answer: Yankee general manager George Weiss. Clearly, Weiss saw something in Stengel that no one else did. "More than luck" had to be involved to keep the Yankees at such a consistently high level of performance over the course of a dozen baseball seasons between 1949 and Stengel's last year as Yankee manager in 1960.

When Stengel's still unparalleled run of ten pennants in twelve years did come to an end, that end was not without its bitterness. The man who could laugh at much, including defeat, could not laugh when the Pirates took the Yankees in seven in 1960. Nor could he laugh when the Yankees brass decided not to bring him back in 1961. Perhaps there was some solace in the fact that he and Weiss not only went out together but went on to the Mets together as well. The

bitterness of defeat and dismissal could never destroy Stengel, even as the prospect of an eleventh pennant continued to elude him by only a few dozen games a year.

Another McGraw parallel is that McGraw had Mel Ott; Stengel thought he had his version of the same when he was handed Mickey Mantle. In Ott, McGraw had a solid player whom he molded into greatness. In Mantle, Stengel encountered a great player who perennially refused to listen to much of anything that his manager might have to say. That was bad enough. What made it worse was that Mantle's predecessor in center field, one Joe DiMaggio, had nothing but contempt for his last big league manager, who also happened to be the only manager who ever benched him but probably not the only manager to receive the DiMaggio freeze.

If Casey Stengel's genius was to maneuver among talented prima donnas while making sure that they continued to perform at peak efficiency, Robert Creamer's biography and Fred Lieb's autobiography serve to remind us that part of that genius was to play the "perfessor"-clown as he managed those more talented than he. Fred Lieb wanted to be remembered as neither a "gee whiz" nor "ah nuts" sports journalist. But his affectionate portraits of ball players across the decades pushes him toward the former category, his own protest notwithstanding. And none of his portraits is more affectionately painted than that of "perfesser" Stengel. "With the exception of Babe Ruth," writes Lieb, "Casey Stengel was the most widely known and best loved man in baseball." Best loved did not necessarily mean "brainy," an adjective Lieb applies to Weiss but not to Stengel. Still, Casey was something other than a "damn fool" (to borrow what Stengel said some people thought of him—and Weiss for appointing him Yankee manager). On the contrary, he was a public relations genius. Stengel always knew how to work the press, Fred Lieb included.

But Casey also knew when to drop all pretense of spin. When the Yankees called a press conference to announce their manager's "retirement" following that fateful 1960 series loss to the Pirates, the ex-skipper announced that "I'm not retiring; I've just been fired." But the Yankee dynasty was not quite finished. And thanks partly to Bison Books, Stengel and McGraw and countless other players and managers across seven decades of baseball history are not finished either.

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