

David Halberstam, *October 1964*. Fawcett Columbine, New York, 1994. Illustrations. pp. xvii + 382. \$US12.95 paper.

Popular books on sport invariably focus on the wondrous deeds of star players and great teams. In so doing such books basically confine themselves to describing in vivid detail action or plays that occurred on the sporting field. In a sense the *actual* players and teams that performed these super human feats are an irrelevant—they are simply reduced to cardboard characters imbued with the function of performing sporting heroics. Books of this genre rarely if ever examine the personal that is players, and the broader context which helps to determine the nature of interaction between players and managers of clubs, and those whom they compete with for sporting glory.

David Halberstam's *October 1964* is an admirable exception to this rule—a popular book that provides masterful insights concerning the 'flesh and blood' of players as they strive to achieve personal and team success. *October 1964* is an account of the 1964 season of two American baseball clubs—the American League's New York Yankees and the National League's St Louis Cardinals—which competed for the World Series', which the Cardinals won four games to three.

Halberstam provides readers with accounts of key plays and games and, to a person who was not brought up on baseball, displays a keen insider/s knowledge of the finer points of the game. Games and plays, however, are essentially a side show for Halberstam. He is more interested in the personal inner world of baseball, of the ways in which players relate to each other, their relationships with baseball management,

the media and so on. In terms of providing an exposition of the internal workings of baseball Halberstam's *October 1964* can be favourably compared to Tom Wolfe's *The Right Stuff* (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, New York, 1979) which examined the unique world of American astronauts.

October 1964 is based on previous writings around this era and interviews with seventy-six contemporaries ranging from players, scouts, coaches, managers, reporters and other relevant baseball persons. It also contains sixteen pages of photographs that serve to enrich the text.

Halberstam is essentially concerned with examining the internal dynamics that occur within baseball clubs and teams. In focusing on clubs that played in the 1964 World Series he contrasts a long time powerhouse on the slide (the Yankees) with a club on the verge of a golden era (the Cardinals). In so doing he examines the pecking order of glory amongst players, their personal rivalries and the different demons that dominated their lives. Halberstam is keenly aware of the fragile nature of sporting success. On page 166 he states that:

A great sports team is always a surprisingly delicate mechanism, because it includes all kinds of egocentric, highly motivated people with a common objective: to win. Yet, at the same time, great teams demand enough talented players with similar goals and drives whose egos may very easily clash. On a great team such tensions are resolved because the idea of winning is so powerful. But they remain just beneath a thin veneer of unity, and they often surface when the idea of winning is not so powerful.

Besides the battle between players to enter 'Baseball's Hall of Fame' there are three major themes which dominate *October 1964*. Firstly, there is the relationship between players and club management and owners. The early 1960s was a period in which management and owners had the upper hand over players through the reserve clause, and except for a few superstars, salaries were relatively low. Halberstam provides details of pig-headed owners whose knowledge of baseball rivalled five year olds and of managers who reminded players that they should confine themselves to playing and not concern themselves with issues pertaining to control or players' rights. Within two years senior players called on the services of steel union official Marvin Miller to revitalise the Major League Baseball Players' Association in extracting major concessions for players.

Secondly, there is the issue of race. Major league baseball was desegregated after World War II when Jackie Robinson was signed by the Brooklyn Dodgers. During the 1950s and 1960s National League clubs were more prepared to employ African-Americans than American League clubs. The New York Yankees were one of the last clubs to hire African-Americans. While the civil rights movement was becoming increasingly active its impact on baseball was relatively slight. Even though clubs were signing African-Americans in increasing numbers during the 1950s and 1960s more often than not their treatment of such players was less than sensitive. African-American players were often groomed in minor league teams and leagues in the south and not only suffered the indignity of continuous racist abuse but also were unable to room and eat with other players, who, in many instances were equally racist as fans. The Cardinals, to their credit were one of the earliest clubs to experiment with means to overcome tensions between 'black' and 'white' players, which in turn is seen by Halberstam as an important explanation of their success in the 1960s.

Thirdly, Halberstam examines issues associated with the generation gap. Older managers and players weighed down by norms established in earlier decades resented younger, more modern players. Such players were seen as being over-paid, pampered, were accused of not playing with the right attitude or hard, enough and having little regard for club and baseball traditions, such as hurling racist and religious abuse at opponents.

October 1964 not only delves into the inner working of two clubs during 1964. It also provides valuable insights into the role of scouts, coaches and managers and examines life in minor league baseball and the relationship between minor and major leagues. In addition, it examines the changing role of the media—newspapers and television—and of how players were in the process of being transformed from sportsmen to entertainers. Halberstam's *October 1964* is a splendid book which provides brilliant insights into what is involved in playing professional sport at the highest level and is highly recommended.

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