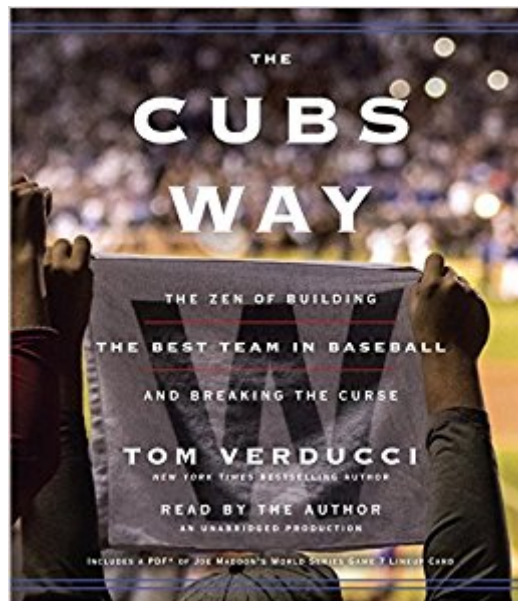




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The Cubs Way: The Zen Of Building The Best Team In Baseball And Breaking The Curse



Synopsis

The New York Times's #1 Bestseller With inside access and reporting, Sports Illustrated senior baseball writer and FOX Sports analyst Tom Verducci reveals how Theo Epstein and Joe Maddon built, led, and inspired the Chicago Cubs team that broke the longest championship drought in sports, chronicling their epic journey to become World Series champions. It took 108 years, but it really happened. The Chicago Cubs are once again World Series champions. How did a team composed of unknown, young players and supposedly washed-up veterans come together to break the Curse of the Billy Goat? Tom Verducci, twice named National Sportswriter of the Year and co-writer of *The Yankee Years* with Joe Torre, will have full access to team president Theo Epstein, manager Joe Maddon, and the players to tell the story of the Cubs' transformation from perennial underachievers to the best team in baseball. Beginning with Epstein's first year with the team in 2011, Verducci will show how Epstein went beyond "Moneyball" thinking to turn around the franchise. Leading the organization with a manual called "The Cubs Way," he focused on the mental side of the game as much as the physical, emphasizing chemistry as well as statistics. To accomplish his goal, Epstein needed manager Joe Maddon, an eccentric innovator, as his counterweight on the Cubs' bench. A man who encourages themed road trips and late-arrival game days to loosen up his team, Maddon mixed New Age thinking with Old School leadership to help his players find their edge. The Cubs Way takes readers behind the scenes, chronicling how key players like Rizzo, Russell, Lester, and Arrieta were deftly brought into the organization by Epstein and coached by Maddon to outperform expectations. Together, Epstein and Maddon proved that clubhouse culture is as important as on-base-percentage, and that intangible components like personality, vibe, and positive energy are necessary for a team to perform to their fullest potential. Verducci chronicles the playoff run that culminated in an instant classic Game Seven. He takes a broader look at the history of baseball in Chicago and the almost supernatural element to the team's repeated losses that kept fans suffering, but also served to strengthen their loyalty. The Cubs Way is a celebration of an iconic team and its journey to a World Championship that fans and readers will cherish for years to come.

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Customer Reviews

"One of the best baseball stories ever, told by one of the best baseball writers ever. It does not get any better than this." [George F. Will](#) "Few who have covered the game in any era can match Tom Verducci's combination of baseball insight and elegance as a writer. Those dual qualities make him the perfect guy to not only capture the experience of what the Cubs at long last achieved, but to explain the thinking and planning that led to last Fall's crescendo of emotions." [Bob Costas](#) "Verducci, a longtime baseball writer for Sports Illustrated, is perhaps the perfect scribe to tell this definitive tale, a generational talent who can talk numbers and remain awed at the game's beauties. In one moment he's describing player valuations, and in the next he's admiring a grand painting. And to fully understand a modern-day championship team, that's essential." [The Washington Post](#) "The Cubs Way is a lush accounting of one of the most thrilling championship runs in American sports history by the numbers and by the personalities that made it happen." [The Wall Street Journal](#) "The Cubs' epic triumph almost demanded that Tom Verducci, arguably the best baseball writer of this generation, weigh in with his perspective. The longtime Sports Illustrated veteran delivers in a big way with unique analysis that takes a deep, deep dive in trying to explain the wizardry of Theo Epstein, Jed Hoyer, Joe Maddon and the entire Cubs braintrust." [The Chicago Tribune](#) "A must-read for any Cubs fan." [SB Nation](#) "In Mr. Verducci's entertaining book, he notes that the construction of a championship team is granular and the final picture is a Seurat painting with many tiny dots of color and millions of reasons and thousands of cascading events. He's right: The artistic brush containing the power of positivity helped make the Chicago Cubs winners once more." [The Washington Times](#)

Tom Verducci is Sports Illustrated's senior baseball writer and a three-time winner of the National Sportswriter of the Year Award. He is also a two-time Emmy Award-winning game and studio analyst for FOX Sports and MLB Network. He was the co-writer of *The Yankee Years* with Joe Torre.

This book is the real deal inside-story. Verducci was there through it all, he clearly did thorough interviews and research with everyone involved after the fact, and he sets up the time to tell his story the way he wants to. There are so many details here it's beautifully hard to take it all in, and as a Cubs fan, it still feels unreal. It is not a great work of literature, but there is some pretty writing. It is also, first and foremost, about the team and the Cubs organization - there are no fan interviews, no attempts to situate the incredible 2016 season in the broader cultural context of that crazy year. The story, and the people in it, exist in isolation. But it is a beautiful story about good people, and for any baseball fan, a well-written dive into the best baseball story of the last century. Highly recommended for a Cubs fan, recommended for a baseball fan, and enjoyable enough for anyone else.

Last night at Major League Baseball's All-Star game, Chicago Cubs Manager Joe Maddon led the National League's elites to a narrow loss, 2 to 1, in an extra-inning pitchers battle. (You think your job is challenging? Imagine trying to coalesce big egos and big bats into one harmonious team in less than 24 hours.) According to author/sports writer Tom Verducci, Maddon is "the Johnny Appleseed of aphorisms." On the first day of the Chicago Cubs' 2016 spring training camp, Maddon delivered his first of three "annual meetings" speeches to the players and his pithy observations were boiled down to six points (#1: "Embrace the target"), two key words "Expectations and Pressure" and then six more one-liners, including "Do simple better" and "The process simplifies the task." "Time-out! Wait-a-minute! Is this a baseball book or a management book? Yes! and it's already on my Top-10 list for 2017, and just might be my Book-of-the-Year pick. It's amazing" and I've already shipped copies to two friends. "The Cubs Way: The Zen of Building the Best Team in Baseball and Breaking the Curse," by Tom Verducci, senior baseball writer for Sports Illustrated, is 375 pages of leadership/management savvy, page-turning drama, and behind-the-scenes sports innovations. Are you trying to change the culture

in your organization? Imagine arriving as president of Cubs baseball operations in 2012 (and enduring a 101-loss season), keeping fans engaged during the building process, then hiring a new manager in 2015 and WHACK! in 2016, the Cubs win their first World Series since 1908! Did I mention that the instant-classic-of-a-series with Cleveland culminated in a sudden death Game 7 in Cleveland on November 2, 2016? Cubs win! Cubs win! Cubs win! (Did I mention it was also my birthday?) OK! (slight conflict of interest. I am a Cubs fan. I endured 21 winters in the Chicago area, but enjoyed numerous summer afternoon baseball games at Wrigley Field, nicknamed "The Friendly Confines", a phrase popularized by "Mr. Cub", Hall of Fame shortstop and first baseman Ernie Banks)

(Let's play two! Read my review of A Nice Little Place on the North Side: Wrigley Field at One Hundred. But trust me whether you are a baseball fan or not, whether you are a Cubs fan or not, you will love this book if you have any inclination to enrich your leadership and management style. So back to Maddon's speech in 2016. His iPad notes also included three favorite leadership quotes:

"Change before you have to." (Jack Welch)

"Wisdom is the reward for a lifetime of listening when you would have preferred to talk." (Doug Larson)

"Communication creates collaboration. Big ears are better than big egos. When you are not listening, ask good questions." (Bill Walsh)

Those insights are from page 261, just one of 54 pages I noted on the blank pages in the front of my book. (I learn with a pen.) Actually, I tried to read the book just for fun. Couldn't! Fifty pages in I started making notes. Let me tempt you with nine more management morsels. Chew slowly:

#9. Recalibrate. In Game 7 of the World Series, the heavens opened and a 17-minute rain delay sent the players to their locker rooms after the ninth inning, with the score tied. In a players-only meeting, the Cubs used that "divine intervention" of 17 minutes to recalibrate. Memo to managers: consider a 17-minute recalibration exercise when your team is stuck. (See Chapter 19.)

#8. Activate. Theo Epstein was hired as the youngest general manager in MLB history when the Boston Red Sox hired him in 2002 at age 28. In 2004, the Red Sox won their first World Series championship in 86 years and won another championship in 2007. So when Epstein joined the Cubs in 2012, he systematized almost everything with a 259-page manual. (Imagine!) He then asked the staff to be responsible "for turning those words into a workplace environment that promoted growth." (See Chapter 6 to understand "The Cubs

Way. *“Have you activated a ‘words into action’ plan?”* #7. Read. To develop the communication skills of a future team leader, Manager Joe Maddon gave infielder Addison Russell *“too quiet for a middle infielder”* a reading assignment: Stephen King’s historical novel, *11/22/63: A Novel*. *“Maddon asked Russell to report back every 50 to 100 pages to discuss it.”* By the way, Russell hit a grand slam in Game 6 *—just the 19th player to do so in a World Series.* #6. Exploit. In addition to the hyper-focus on analytics and technology in baseball today (stunning!), Epstein made a bet on an *“old-school resource: people.”* The author quotes their early aspirations: *“‘maybe we can be better than anyone else with how we treat our players and how we connect with players and the relationships we develop’—‘Maybe our environment will be the best in the game’—‘Maybe our vibe will be the best in the game’—‘Maybe our players will be the loosest and maybe they’ll have the most fun’—‘And maybe they’ll care the most.’”* #5. Communicate. One of Epstein’s big a-ha! moments: just for fun, he pulled out a scouting report on a player-turned-coach *“and his coach was stunned to read that the scout noted areas needing improvement, but no one had told him during his playing days! Who needs to improve but has never received feedback from you?”* #4. Relocate. *“After the 2012 season, as he does every year, Epstein took a Change of Scenery survey. He asked his 40 or so scouts and baseball operations people to submit a list of names of major and minor league players they believed would flourish with a change of scenery and why.”* #3. Balance. Even baseball players crave a balanced life, so when the Cubs were recruiting Pitcher Jon Lester in 2015, they noted that *“the Cubs fly the fewest miles in baseball over the course of a regular season, and how a home schedule heavily tilted toward day games would allow the Lesters to have breakfast with their kids and tuck them in at night on 63 game days.”* #2. Prioritize. CEOs and managers will pick up immediate interviewing techniques from *“The Cubs Way.”* Example: Epstein interviewed Maddon with *“a long list of a manager’s responsibilities, including empowering the coaching staff, working with the media, handling the bullpen, creating lineups, dealing with a petulant superstar, and running spring training.”* The assignment: place them in order of importance and explain why. #1. Teach. In his early years, Maddon led baseball clinics across Europe and *“the preparation and teaching emboldened him.”* He observed,

“You will remember 75 percent of what you write down and you will remember 90 percent of what you teach. So I wrote it down and then I taught it. What’s the learning style of your team members? Go Cubs!

While *The Cubs Way* reads more like an eventual 108 year victory lap for long suffering Chicago Cubs fans, I think baseball fans in general can take a lot from the story of the 2016 Chicago Cubs. If you are looking to build a champion the blueprint has been proven out over the last few years. Build from within, smart free agent signings, and above all else have a plan and stick to it • resist the urge to panic and do something that will set the franchise back for years. That is the real story of the Cubs Way. The book is divided in coverage discussing both key players and the brain trust • Epstein, Hoyer, Maddon and several other front office people and coaches. In this way, I think this appeals to both baseball fans, but people who find the business side of baseball fascinating as well. In a book where the outcome is known: Cubs win World Series, much of the country erupts into mass hysteria, it would’ve been easy as a matter of presentation to just blow through the seven games in a rapid fire way, but Verducci alternates between one of the World Series games and a key development in the creation of the team that was a nice touch to make Cubs fans earn the win by finishing the book. If you want to know How the Cubs won for personal or business reasons, I suggest you start with *The Cubs Way*.

To use the old cliché, this one knocks it out of the park! At the top level we are given the story of the seven games that made up the 2016 World Series told with all the details that made me relive the experience. Underlying this story and woven through the story of the seven games is the story of the 2016 Chicago Cubs - from the start of Spring Training all the way through the playoffs. Then, as if that were not enough, we get the story of the five years of Theo Epstein’s management, his theories, his execution in building a team with character, and how he did it. This deeper story forms the foundation for the explosive, miraculous seeming season we had last year. We get an inside view of many of the thousands of decisions that resulted in a championship, any one of which might have gone the other way and pushed the Cubs to 109 years. These decisions and how they were made tell how it was done - and also helps explain what is going on in the 2017 season. If you need one book to capture the 2017 season, this is the one to get. I’m not impartial towards the Cubs - I’ve been a card-carrying "Die Hard" fan for just half of the 108 year drought (54 years of hopes and dreams). I’ve suffered the death by a thousand cuts many times over but it was all worth it. It is a

bitter-sweet moment though - I still think of the Ron Santo's, the Mike Royko's and thousands of others who gave so much loyalty to the club and then didn't get to see the ultimate triumph. I thank Tom Verdicci for giving us this book as a kind of monument.

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