



BEYOND THE BOOK
A WINNING SEASON? IT'S TIME TO TAKE SPORTSWRITING SERIOUSLY

KENNEALLY: On behalf of Copyright Clearance Center, my name is Chris Kenneally. I'm the moderator for another special edition of a program we call *Beyond the Book*. We're here to join the BookExpo America extravaganza this weekend at the Jacob Javits Center in New York City. And this is as close as I'll ever get, I think, to being an announcer for a World Series baseball game. Because it's a beautiful day, there's some great players here to talk to and to watch as they tell us all about their stories, and it feels as if there's like a World Series here of authors and editors.

I want to start with David Maraniss, who is, among many other things, an associate editor at the *Washington Post*, and the author of four critically acclaimed, best-selling books – *They Marched into Sunlight: War and Peace Vietnam and America*, *When Pride Still Mattered: A Life of Vince Lombardi*, *First in His Class: A Biography of Bill Clinton*, and last year's *Clemente: The Passion and Grace of Baseball's Last Hero*. He also recently served as guest editor for *Best American Sportswriting 2007*. He is the author of *The Clinton Enigma*, and co-author of *The Prince of Tennessee: Al Gore Meets His Fate*, and *Tell Newt to Shut Up*. During his nearly three-decade career at the *Post*, he has won virtually every major award in journalism, including the 1993 Pulitzer Prize for national reporting. Welcome, David.

MARANISS: Thank you.

(applause)

KENNEALLY: Indeed, well deserved. You've written biographies of Bill Clinton and Vince Lombardi, among others. And since we're talking here about sportswriting and how it may or may not differ from other kinds of writing, I want to ask you

did you approach Vince Lombardi as a subject any differently than you might Bill Clinton?

MARANISS: Well, I have to say that when I was researching the Lombardi book, or writing it, Bill Clinton's second term was unfolding in some difficult ways for him. So it was a relief for me to go home from after appearing on television trying to explain Bill Clinton, to go home and write about the Packer sweep. But in fact, I approach all of my books the same way, with the same level of research. And some are a little easier than others, but I try to do it the same way. My first motto is go there, wherever there is. For Lombardi, that meant persuading – uttering the famous last words to my wife, how would you like to move to Green Bay for the winter?

KENNEALLY: And you did.

MARANISS: Yeah. And I did, and we loved it. But Bill Clinton and Vince Lombardi, they seem like polar opposites. One, the symbol of the old way and discipline, and the other sort of the symbol of the post-war Baby Boom generation and all of its undiscipline. But in fact I found a lot of commonalities between those two people. The obsession to win, first of all. Incredible will power. Coming out of nowhere to succeed – Bill Clinton from Hope and Hot Springs, Arkansas, to become the first Baby Boomer President of the U.S. Vince Lombardi really struggling in anonymity for 20 years and almost ready to give up coaching, ready to become a bank official, when he got his shot. And went from New York City, where he lived most of his life, out to little Green Bay and turned it around.

Another aspect they had in common, surprisingly, was they're both educated in Jesuit colleges. Bill Clinton coming out of Arkansas – his first year at Georgetown, one of the seminarians there took him out for a hamburger and a beer. And after a short discussion, said, you know, Bill, you really ought to come into the priesthood. And Clinton said, well, don't you have to be a Catholic first? He was a Baptist. But he was so good at adapting to any situation that all the seminarians there thought he was a Catholic. And Lombardi, of course, was a Jesuit through and through. Trained at Fordham. And there's a scene in my Lombardi book where his secretary in Green Bay sneaks into his office late one afternoon and sees him in there wearing priest's garments. I mean, he really sort of in some ways thought that we where he should have been.

KENNEALLY: And you also uncovered something that surprised me, that Vince Lombardi almost had a political career.

MARANISS: Well – yes. It would have been a disaster. But it wouldn't have been as big a disaster as what happened. This was actually when Richard Nixon was looking for a running mate. And he asked John Mitchell to check out Vince Lombardi. And John Mitchell came back and said, you know, his wife loves you,

Marie. And he's got all of the things you're looking for, but there's one problem – he's a Kennedy Democrat. So Nixon took Spiro Agnew instead.

KENNEALLY: You told me when we chatting about this panel that your subject really is American culture. And I want to ask you about how sports figures serve as a lens into that for you.

MARANISS: Yeah. Well, they can. I don't want to pretend that sports figures are sort of the best representatives of American culture, but they can offer some wonderful opportunities to explore some of the key issues of American life. And so whether it's writing about the mythology of competition and success, as Michael Lewis does with Bill Parcells – which is one of the stories in the anthology that I edited – or Vince Lombardi, it really – what sports does is provides you first what you need as a writer, which is a great, dramatic story. And then you can move into culture from there. I don't want to exaggerate it. There are times when some writers try to put culture into a sports book when it doesn't belong. But with some figures, you can do it. And so with like Jackie Robinson or Roberto Clemente, what better lens is there into race and culture in America than sports? And so in those ways, I think it provides incredible opportunity.

KENNEALLY: Well, tell us about your experience as guest editor for the *Best Sportswriting* anthology. You got an opportunity to read dozens of pieces. And give us a snapshot of the state of sportswriting today.

MARANISS: You know, I honestly think that sportswriting has always had the best and the worst in writing. And so I don't like to distinguish one golden era from another. I read some incredible pieces this year and some that I thought were stereotypes and trite. But the ones I picked, I tried to pick a wide spectrum of the most interesting stories that I could find. And so they ranged from Michael Lewis, who's an incredibly well-known sportswriter, and Sally Jenkins, one of the great columnists in the country, to a guy I'd never heard of, who I guess has a book coming out this year, named Derek Zumsteg, who – the piece he submitted was on a website called U.S.S. Mariner, which I'd never heard of. And it was a fabulous deconstruction of a 1947 Bugs Bunny cartoon, where Bugs plays all nine positions, and beats the Gas-House Gorillas. And he does it like he's from Sabermetrics, you know, the (inaudible). And he just deconstructs it in a marvelous way. And I wrote a little preface for each of the stories, and I said I'd never heard of U.S.S. Mariner, this piece probably could have used an editor, but on the other hand, an editor wouldn't have let it go, and it's a fabulous piece. So I was just delighted to be able to get it into the book.

KENNEALLY: How do you think sportswriting shapes the way fans relate to the athletes and the sports themselves?

MARANISS: Well, my feeling about sports – and I'm sure it's something that Peter has documented – is that athletes don't change. The culture changes around them, but

athletes – I mean, you talk about that golden era of Vince Lombardi and the Green Bay Packers, they were a bunch of roustabouts. Jimmy Taylor and Paul Hornung. And the same with the Yankees of the '50s and '60s. So the athletes today are the same as then. The culture has changed around them. There's huge amount more money, there's a lot more television, talk radio 24 hours a day. And so the press is focused on everything they do, whereas in the '50s and '60s, really not until I guess the early – or Jim Brosnan in '59 sort of wrote *The Long Season* –

GOLENBOCK: ESPN.

MARANISS: – and –

GOLENBOCK: ESPN.

MARANISS: – yeah, ESPN. But starting then, it started to infiltrate some of what was really going on with these athletes. And then now, anything they do – Stray Rod –

GOLENBOCK: Stray Rod.

MARANISS: – is the headline of the week. With Alex Rodriguez. So it's changed immensely, and that changes the way fans view sports. Although, I have an odd, contradictory sensibility about it, which my dad shares with me. Which is as much as I'm interested in hard reporting and believe it's completely necessary, when I'm listening to a ball game, I want to listen on the radio to the worst homer around. Someone like Ron Santo.

GOLENBOCK: Exactly.

MARANISS: You know? I love that. And it really is a balm to everything else that's going on.

KENNEALLY: You are not one to think of athletes as heroes. And yet the book on Clemente talks about his as a hero. What do you see in him that makes him a hero, when others perhaps aren't?

MARANISS: Well, the truth is that I have some second-thoughts about even using that in the subtitle of the book, because hero is the most overused word in sports. My first idea was to call it *The Passion of Clemente*, but Mel Gibson ruined that idea. So anyway, hero got into the subtitle. I love Clemente. He wasn't a saint. And the book shows that. But he was the rare athlete who was growing as human being, as his talents – well, they didn't diminish much, but as he was getting older. And he died in a way that is the classic definition of a hero, which is someone who gives his life in the service of others. He died in a plane crash trying to deliver humanitarian aid to Nicaragua after a horrible earthquake there, where he had sent down aid and heard that Anastasio Somoza, the strong man of Nicaragua, was

really stealing the aid, diverting it at the airport. He said if I go with it to the people, and that's what sent him onto this ill-fated plane, so –

KENNEALLY: And, well –

MARANISS: – in that sense, he was heroic.

KENNEALLY: And your reporting uncovered something, which was that he should never have been on that plane, that plane should never have flown.

MARANISS: Right. The documents I got – that no one had ever seen before – on that actual plane – the internal documents of the Federal Aviation Commission were the most devastating I've ever read, including anything I read about Vietnam. The owner of the plane did not know how to fly it, he'd taken it out once and taxied into a ditch. The Federal Aviation Administration was under direct orders not to allow tramp airlines like that to take off and fly without surveillance. The pilot hadn't any sleep in 27 hours, and had, himself, was about to have his license revoked. They didn't have a flight engineer on the plane, so they recruited a mechanic off the ramp to be the flight engineer. And the pilot was sleeping in the cockpit while it was loaded – 4000 plus pounds overloaded. It didn't have a chance. And it just barely got off the runway in San Juan, and crashed into the sea.

KENNEALLY: Well, I think what we just learned was that sportswriting isn't just about sports, it's about almost any topic really that involves human beings. And I want to turn now to Cait Murphy, and a book which promises a lot of fun, but really goes beyond the baseball field. Cait, your new book is called *Crazy 08: How a Cast of Cranks, Rogues, Boneheads and Magnates Created the Greatest Year in Baseball History*. That's perhaps one of the best titles of the year, I would say. And it promises a tremendous amount. What was it that attracted you to that particular season for the Chicago Cubs?

MURPHY: Well, I've been a life-long baseball fan. I'm actually a Mets fan, just for a full disclosure. And it was about 2003 – I was just – I wanted to write a book. I've been a journalist my whole career, and I wanted the experience. So I started looking for book ideas. I was by no means necessarily looking for a baseball idea. But then my father suggested, oh, why don't you look into the 1908 season, I think that was an interesting year. And then I began to research it, and I realized that was quite an understatement. I spent a lot of time just reading the newspapers of 1908. And as I started reading about the baseball season, I mean just every once in awhile, after going through the microform, I would just start.

I mean, there's things like – and this is the origin of the title, Crazy 08 – in August, the fans of the Washington Senators – known as the Nationals at the time – give their manager a gift, which is improbable because they were a terrible team anyway. But they give him a gift at home plate before a game – big ceremony. The gift was a wolf. He opens up this big, and out bounds a wolf. Now, things like

this don't happen anymore. There were numerous cases of fans sort of trying to engage in the play – so after a great play, fans would run out and do handsprings around the bases. There's a great story of Matty being fished out of the showers – quite literally out of the clubhouse shower – to come in to save a crucial game against the Cubs. And so I began reading all this stuff, and I said this is too much fun. This needs to get out there.

And then the other thing about going through the newspapers of 1908 that I tried to do, as David tries to do, is to set it in the context of the place and time. No sport ever takes place strictly between the lines. The kinds of people who are playing, the cities in which they're playing, the nature of the stadiums in which they're playing – all that is affected by things outside the lines.

KENNEALLY: And though 1908 – of course, century ago and a different world entirely – and yet, there are elements of it which we would find familiar. Tell us about those.

MURPHY: Well, one of the things I concluded was that if any of us could go back to a ballgame in 1908, we would be totally at home. I mean we probably wouldn't want to get pig's knuckles at the ballpark.

GOLENBOCK: You don't know.

MURPHY: Maybe a shot of whiskey. But, again, between the lines, the game would be utterly familiar. And I think we would also be very impressed with the quality of play.

KENNEALLY: Well, that's something you were telling me – that a lot of people have an impression that the play wasn't that great – this was the dead ball era. And yet, what you learned was that they were really committed athletes.

MURPHY: Totally committed athletes. Clearly, there was no African-Americans playing, there was very few foreigners – maybe zero. And also, scouting was very unsystematic. So I think there was probably a lot of talent left in the Central Valley of California, or the plains of Idaho or whatever. But clearly, the players who did make it to the major leagues were very, very good. The rules of baseball were more or less first laid down in 1845, so you had sort of 60 years of glossing the rules. This was not an unsophisticated game. And one of my favorite examples of this comes from Johnny Evers – or Evers – either, either – in his 1912 book. Tells the story of using a watch – a stopwatch – to time the pitcher to catcher, the catcher throw to second base for a stolen base. Which I thought was pretty sophisticated stuff. I mean George Will has like a whole chapter on that, in *Men at Work* 90 years later. So it was highly sophisticated.

KENNEALLY: Well, I should have mentioned when we started chatting that your work as a journalist has taken you around the world. You worked for *The Economist* in

London, the *Wall Street Journal Asia* in Hong Kong. And I wanted to ask – for you, as you wrote the book – did you think that the book may have an audience beyond America? Is this something that is translatable, if you will? Do we really need to have lived with baseball all of our lives to grasp the importance of it to this culture?

MURPHY: Sadly, I think overseas sales are going to be slim. Although I told my friends in England, I'm watching.

KENNEALLY: Well, I wasn't thinking England, but certainly Asia has come to be a baseball powerhouse.

MURPHY: Yeah, it is. But I think the thing is – I mean, Japan has a pretty rich baseball tradition. But it's a rich Japanese baseball tradition. I mean, I loved *You Gotta Have Wa*, but that was really about the cultural – I wouldn't call it clash, but –

GOLENBOCK: Differences.

MURPHY: Differences of American and Japanese baseball. I think the reason that the people who have read the book seem to enjoy it is because there's so many things we, as Americans, know about baseball without even knowing we know it. And I don't think you actually have that anywhere else. So, sorry, Beth, my marketing person is here. But I don't think overseas is big market.

KENNEALLY: And one of the things, as we look back on the past, is we think somehow, things were better. Perhaps the play wasn't better, maybe the characters were better. Certainly, there were tremendous characters in the book. But one thing that has stayed the same is that money has always mattered in baseball.

MURPHY: Money has always mattered, and until recently, people have always denied money has mattered. The players in 1908 were paid, on the average, about \$2500 a season. Which doesn't sound like a lot to us, but it was an excellent wage. It was about triple what a teacher was making in 1908. The reserve clause and other economic restrictions were already in place – they had very little leverage negotiating the terms of their work. But there were regular hold outs, there were regular attempts to unionize. When the American League emerged in the early 20th century, over a hundred players jumped, chiefly for higher salaries. And when I sometimes give talks at bookstores and things, people seem disappointed when I say this. But you know, for heaven's sakes – these are young men, a lot of them with families. And they took baseball very seriously, this was their profession. And they deserved to be paid for it.

KENNEALLY: And the other thing is that we have an image of them as hayseeds, and yet you uncovered an interesting fact that would lead us to believe they were probably reasonably smart about what they were doing.

MURPHY: Yes. I mean, some of them were hayseeds. But research by a sociologist found that about 25% of baseball players had some college education in 1910. And that compared to 5% of the U.S. population. So a considerably higher proportion of players had – were college educated than in America. Now, that does leave the other 75%. And I'm not even saying college is a proxy for being civilized or educated, it's just a metric that I think people can grasp. There were a lot of people off the farms, out of factories – from extremely humble backgrounds. But the point is, that I try to make in the book, this is America in 1908. The average American had six years of education. So to – we look at them and we say, they look pretty crude and uneducated. In 1908, they actually didn't look that way at all. And they were actually – by 1908, they were frequently featured in advertising. They were held up as heroes, they're invited to the White House – their social status is pretty good. Now, you do have freaks like Rube Waddell that would prove everything I just said wrong. But as a whole, they were not uncivilized hayseeds.

KENNEALLY: Well, if the portrait of the athletes in 1908 is a little more uplifting than we might imagine, the portrait of the journalists covering the game leaves something to be desired. Tell us about their relationship to the players, and to the businesses that were the baseball teams.

MURPHY: Well, they were essentially wholly-owned subsidiaries of the clubs. The clubs paid their travel and expenses, and in return expected a very soft shoe, and they generally got it. One of the frustrations of researching this book is I get used to going to the newspaper the next day and getting quotes from the managers and the players, and things like that – doesn't happen. They turn a blind eye to some serious issues. Well, for example though, a key pitcher for the White Sox walks off the team for a month in June in the middle of the pennant race that the Sox eventually lose by a single game. I've never been able to figure out why. And so things like that, I think, are just astonishing.

GOLENBOCK: Who was the pitcher?

MURPHY: Frank Smith. Piano-Mover Smith.

GOLENBOCK: Yeah.

MURPHY: And another case, which is – I couldn't believe it when I came across this thing. And again, this is the intersection of sport and not sport. The teams would frequently play exhibition games on off days. It was just a money-making thing for the owners. So again, even in the pennant race, even when you're injured and tired. In August, 1908, the Giants play an exhibition game in Springfield, Illinois, and the sportswriter covering the game doesn't mention that the city is under martial law. Springfield has just had three days of – I called it white-on-black mob violence – I don't think they're race riots, it was totally one-sided. Doesn't see fit to mention it. And the *Sporting Life* mentions that McGraw and the team were in

Springfield, and notes he got a piece of rope used to lynch someone as a good luck thing. So it's pretty different.

On the other hand, some of the language I find kind of fun. You never just hit the ball – you pound the pellet on the proboscis, and things. So –

KENNEALLY: Well, they were being paid by the word, so they tried to drag it out. Perhaps that was it. Well thank you, Cait.

MURPHY: Thank you.

KENNEALLY: I want to turn now to Star Lawrence. Starling Lawrence is Editor-in-Chief and Vice Chairman at W.W. Norton and Company, where he has worked since 1969. He's here with us today because among the authors he's published at Norton are Michael Lewis, Sebastian Junger, Patrick O'Brian, Vincent Bugliosi. He is an author himself, and has published a volume of short stories, *Legacies*, and two novels, *Montenegro*, and most recently, *The Lightning Keeper*. He was born in New York and received degrees from Princeton and Cambridge before he joined the Peace Corps, serving in Cameroon. And welcome, Star.

LAWRENCE: Thank you.

KENNEALLY: With sports figures, it's common, as we've heard, to use the vocabulary of mythology, and teams are cursed, athletes are heroes, rivals lock in fierce battle. Do you think of sportswriting and the writers that you've worked with as at all engaged in myth making? It's a leading question, I suppose. But if it's not, is it a way to upend the myths?

LAWRENCE: I think people have always used myth to organize their understanding of the world. I mean, the Greeks did it, we do it. I certainly think that sports figures make excellent mythic subjects. And whether they conform absolutely to the convenient or the simplified version of the myth is another question. Of course, they don't. But I think that sportswriting – good and bad sportswriting – does – certainly depends on elements of myth. It's interesting to people. It's the way we think about our own lives. So I think it's necessarily part of sportswriting.

KENNEALLY: And it's the way the games are organized. There's a certain mythic proportion already there. Your definition of non-fiction was a satisfying collection of facts. And I guess what I wanted to ask you, as someone who's worked with variety of men and women who collect facts for a living, is the way that Michael Lewis approaches his subject different, and how, from the way that Sebastian Junger might?

LAWRENCE: I don't know that I can answer that. I think both authors, and maybe anybody who writes an interesting book, is willing to take a detour from what might be said to be strictly the subject of the book, and find the interesting path that

takes you away from the subject. And if you're really good, it's going to lead you back again. Digressions, interesting digressions. *The Perfect Storm*, you learn about wave physics and meteorology, and I don't think he would have written the book in the first place had he not had a near, very close call with drowning in the ocean. And he writes about what it's like to drown. Which of course, is a useful – useful. And interesting to the reader, given the subject of the book.

Michael Lewis just does not write about one thing. In fact, I think everything he writes, or everything he's ever going to write that is truly interesting is about market mechanisms. That's what *The Blindside* was, that's what *Moneyball* was. And it's certainly what his first book, *Liar's Poker* was. And his mind just works in interesting ways. He sees things that other people can – perhaps have looked at the same information, and he will just take it in a different direction. And I find it absolutely fascinating – in the work of those authors, or in the work of any author – when I am taken someplace I didn't know I was going to go. And that's true.

John Kenneth Galbraith wrote an admiring review of his fellow Canadian, Robertson Davies. And he said the secret of the fascination of Davies' fiction is that he gets you interested – in the course of a novel – he gets you interested in information that you didn't know, and you would have sworn you had no interest in when you started the book. And it is Davies' genius to make you interested in stuff you would have dismissed as a subject of inquiry.

KENNEALLY: When it comes to sportswriting though, does it help that Michael played ball himself, do you think? And in what ways?

LAWRENCE: I certainly do think it helped. He wrote a slender little book called *Coach*, which is about him as a high school – sort an accidental high school baseball hero, very accidental. Fat, white kid is what he referred to himself as his qualification for pitching. But yes, I think he's – Michael gets a look in his eye when he does this. He's remembering what that moment felt like when the pitcher who had been pitching was taken out for a non-sporting reason, and he was given the ball. And he has his line in this little book – he said there I am, blah blah blah, and he sets the scene for you. And he said I am about to show the world, and myself, what I can do. And it's his relationship with a coach that has brought him to this point. So that was clearly a really important moment in his life. And he has spent the rest of his life showing himself, and the world, what he can do.

KENNEALLY: As an editor, though, do you think that someone could write a book about baseball who's never thrown a baseball?

LAWRENCE: I guess my question would be why would they do that? Why would they want to do that? It's possible. But I –

GOLENBOCK: Do you know somebody who's never thrown a baseball?

KENNEALLY: No, I actually – that’s a good point, Peter. It’s hard to imagine. But I’m sure, if we think about other sports that are just less commonly played – and it’s a question I might ask the other panelists in a moment – but to have had the experience of being an athlete. I guess I’ll put it that way – not necessarily playing a particular game, but to have had the experience of being an athlete – is that a prerequisite for writing an engaging book about sports?

LAWRENCE: I don’t think I can answer the question. I don’t honestly know. I think that you do learn things in playing sports, you learn things about yourself.

KENNEALLY: There’s an appreciation –

LAWRENCE: And you –

KENNEALLY: – for the game.

LAWRENCE: – learn – and you don’t have to be a world-beater athlete to learn something. In fact, you learn some things about yourself that you tuck away that are useful and not very – perhaps not very positive information. You learn something about your limitations, and what you do with those givens.

KENNEALLY: Well, thank you, Star. I want to turn now to Peter Golenbock. Peter is the author of many, many books on sports. Most recently a novel, actually, *7: The Mickey Mantle Novel*, and the other book titles have included *Wrigleyville*, *Wild, High and Tight: The Life of Billy Martin*, *Bums*, and the *New York Times* bestsellers, *Dynasty*, *The Bronx Zoo*, written with Sparky Lyle, *Number 1* with Billy Martin, and *Balls* with Craig Nettles. Peter lives in St. Petersburg, Florida. Welcome to the panel, Peter.

GOLENBOCK: Thank you very much.

(applause)

KENNEALLY: I was intrigued to learn that you began your own sportswriting career as a correspondent from a certain small town in New Hampshire. And it was already, though, a kind of foreshadowing of the direction your writing would take. Tell us about that.

GOLENBOCK: Well, I didn’t know it. I mean, I was a freshman at Dartmouth College, and I started working for *The Dartmouth*, which was the campus newspaper. And I guess I was pretty good at it, because very soon they asked me if I would be the campus correspondent to the *New York Times*. And they were paying me \$5 an article. You’d write two paragraphs and a box score, and they said you can write about any sport you want to. And for crying out loud, they had dozens and dozens of different sports. I thought, boy, I’m going to get rich. And I was making a good \$30 a week doing that. I was one of the wealthiest guys on campus.

KENNEALLY: That was good walking-around money in those days. But there was also a figure on campus who became important to you who did relate to the future of your career.

GOLENBOCK: Yeah. It's kind of amazing how it works like that. When I was a kid, I discovered a book called *The New York Yankees* by Frank Graham. And I have no idea why this book meant so much to me, but I must have read it a hundred times. Because in this book, he had conversations with Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig. And I think the book came out in like 1946, something like that. And this was the history of the Yankees. Frank Graham was this wonderful sportswriter. One of the guys who wrote conversations, as opposed to just facts. I was more – I was always interested in the people more so than exactly what they did. Though if you were a Yankee fan, you knew they were going to win.

And so the athletic director at Dartmouth was a fellow by name of Red Rolfe, who turned out to be – he was a third baseman for those Yankees during the '30s and the '40s. And when he was there, he was sort of on his way out. I mean, everybody wanted him to leave. All the coaches wanted a new guy, wanted new blood. Red was kind of a pain in the ass. The baseball coach wanted him gone. But to me, he was like a god. I was like a 16-year old freshman at Dartmouth College, and this was Red Rolfe, who had played ball with Lou Gehrig and played ball with Joe DiMaggio. And it was a chance for me to sit with him and ask him about these guys. And so I became sort of a pet of Red's, because here was this kid who actually cared about him and cared about his career. And I didn't realize it, but Red Rolfe was the first of probably 400 interviews that I've had with former Major League players. It was magical, for me.

KENNEALLY: That's terrific, the way life really began that early for you –

GOLENBOCK: (inaudible) amazing.

KENNEALLY: – in your career. And it would continue that way – tell us about how you pitched your first book idea, and that then became the bestseller.

GOLENBOCK: Well, also unique kind of a thing. After Dartmouth, I went to NYU law school, where I spent most of my time hanging out with the Knicks and the Rangers and the Yankees and the Jet and the Giants. I mean, I was not a very good law student, and I knew just enough to get by. And I got my first job working for Friedman and Fishman. And I lasted there six weeks, because they handed me this stack of cases and they said, OK, we want you to handle these. And in six of them, the statute of the limitations had run. Now, that's a six-year statute of limitations where if you let the statute run, your client cannot get into court. And you can be disbarred for that. So either Friedman or Fishman, one of the two of them, said here's this pile of cases. And I brought them back to him and said, hey, the statute

run on these six cases. And he said to me, OK, call these people up and tell them why they don't have a case. And I said I quit. And that was it.

And then I went to the *New York Times*, and I got myself a job at Prentice Hall as a journalist, writing about President Nixon's wage and price controls. And this was the summer of 1972, and I discovered the whole thing was kind of a fraud because all the prices were allowed to go up, but none of the wages. So sort of Republican duplicity that perhaps we've seen before. At any rate, after six weeks, I found a trade book catalog from Prentice Hall. And I thought to myself, well, I can write a book better than the stuff I'm seeing in this catalogue. And I ran downstairs just to knock on the door of the trade book editor's office, and it was such a small operation that he didn't even have a secretary. And so he says come in, and I went in. And I told him, look, during the 16 years between 1949 and 1964, the Yankees won 14 pennants and nine world championships, this would make a great book. And not only that – every year, they had more than a million in attendance, so that's 16 million people. And if I can sell books to just 1% of those people, we'll have a bestseller. And he says, OK, I'll give you a contract.

KENNEALLY: And that –

GOLENBOCK: And that's what happened. And then – and it doesn't happen very often. And actually, I told that story to the *Bergen Record* in the first article about this particular book after it came out, and Dincheo (sp?) received 60, 70 book proposals. And they were all terrible, so –

KENNEALLY: He didn't take any of them.

GOLENBOCK: Yeah. Right.

KENNEALLY: Well, that was a wonderful stroke of luck for you. But then something happened – you worked on the book for almost a year, researching the record of those years, and determined that that was hardly going to be enough?

GOLENBOCK: Well, I went to Yankee Stadium, and the Yankees – Bob Fishel was the PR guy, and Marty Appel, who's still a close friend of mine, was his assistant. And they said, sure, you can do whatever research you want, we're got all these newspaper articles in our files, and you're welcome to hang with us. And I became sort of an unpaid member of the Yankees during the 1972-73 season. Steinbrenner came along right after that and fired everybody. But this was before everybody got fired. And so they let me hang around. And after I had compiled all my information with which I was going to write this book, it occurred to me quite in the pit of my stomach that none of this information was worth a damn. I hadn't quite formulated it. But if you're going to write a book, the idea is you're going to write something that somebody's never read before. You better give them something new, or it's not worth doing it.

And so I went back to Dinchekeo and I said look, I need – he gave me \$2500 to start. So at the end of the year, I went back to him and I said, look, I need to interview these guys. Will you give me another \$2500, and he said yes. If he had said no, my career was over. I would have owed him \$2500, and I don't know what I would have done. But he said yes. So he gave me \$2500 – I started going around the country interviewing. I started with Jim Constanti and ended up with Mantle and Maris, and Clete Boyer and Whitey Ford, and everybody who played on the Yankees, I went to see them. Interviewed them all. I had to go back for another \$2500, and yet a fourth \$2500, and each time, the guy gave me the money. And that enabled me to finish the book.

KENNEALLY: Well, tell us about the first meeting with Mickey, and – he told you something that must have struck you, and I'm imagining became the seed that got planted that wound up being this new book.

GOLENBOCK: Yeah, without a doubt.

KENNEALLY: Tell us about that.

GOLENBOCK: Mickey had – I'd called Mickey. The Yankees were wonderful to me, just wonderful. And they gave me access to all the telephone numbers of all their former Yankees. If I tried to do this today, the Yankees are so rotten today that I couldn't even get in the door. They'd have hung up on me. But I'd been hanging around for a year and made friends with all these people, and they said sure, here's our list of alumni with their addresses and telephone numbers. Which certainly made – David can tell you – that's the trick of these things. Find out where these people are, and sometimes that's the hardest part. And so I called Mickey at home, and he said, sure, come over the house, I'll be glad to talk to you. And I showed up and knocked on the door. And I guess it was Merlyn who answered, and I said where's Mickey? And she said he's in New York. Well, apparently, Mickey –

KENNEALLY: Mickey was being Mickey.

GOLENBOCK: Mickey was being Mickey. And so I got on a plane, went to New York, and I met him there in the clubhouse. And we talked for over an hour, and he proceeded to tell me some of the most intimate aspects of his life. The thing I discovered about Mickey is you could generally ask him anything, and he would give you, if he trusted you, an open, honest answer. And so among the things he told me about – he told me about – I was the first person he told about his fears. Mickey had retired in '68, and this was '72 or '73. And so Mickey said to me, he said at night, I go to sleep and I have this dream that I'm standing outside of Yankee Stadium, and I can hear the public address announcer going now batting in the third position, number seven, Mickey Mantle, and I can't find the door to get inside the stadium. And I can hear Casey Stengel saying where's Mickey, where's Mickey. And I can't get in. And he said, and I would wake up in a cold sweat. You know? Which was very, very interesting.

Mickey was one of those athletes who should have dropped dead on the day that he quit. Because he just could not figure out what he wanted to do with the rest of his life. And he really wasn't equipped to do anything with the rest of his life. He was fortunate, because he was so incredibly famous, and people would pay him money to go to dinners or go to openings of malls, or that sort of thing. And people, beginning about '87 or '88, would pay him \$25, \$30, \$40 to sign his name to a piece of paper. Which Mickey also thought was totally ridiculous. What I loved about Mickey was that he did not think he was any big deal. Mickey could not understand why people were so gaga about him. Which was a totally endearing quality about him. Plus, he was one of the funniest, funniest people I have ever had the pleasure of sitting with. We'd be sitting in a bar, and he would be telling these incredible raucous jokes – many of which, I put in this book.

I mean, this is a very, very funny book because Mickey was a very, very funny person. I find it unbelievably ironic that the *New York Post* ripped me a new you-know-what for being so – they said it was pornographic. And then, of course, they should come out – after following poor Alex Rodriguez around – Stray Rod. Still one of the great – in history that will go down as one of the great headlines of sports history. But the fact that they're following this guy around – there's something very sleazy and sort of semi-disgraceful about all of that.

KENNEALLY: But the thing that's different with this book, of course, is that you got an opportunity, because it's a novel, to imagine things that didn't necessarily happen, and write them.

GOLENBOCK: Well, I mean the things that are in this book are things that happened. What I had to do – I mean, I was forced to do it. The reason I called it a novel is that if I had not called it a novel, the *New York Post* would have ripped me a new one for not being able to establish my sources. I didn't want to – who was that fellow with a million little lies – James –

LAWFRENCE: Frey.

KENNEALLY: James Frey

GOLENBOCK: Frey. I didn't want to be James Fried. So I deliberately called it The Mickey Mantle Novel. But all of these things in this book happened. What I didn't have the opportunity to interview anybody about, because the people who told me these stories had passed away, was the details. And so the things that are in this book happened. But I must tell you, the details of it, for a number of these stories, I had to imagine.

KENNEALLY: And yet, you got an opportunity, because it was a novel, to imagine yourself as Mickey.

GOLENBOCK: Well, amazingly enough – you sort of transform yourself – I wrote this thing in the first person, with Mickey telling the story. This is the autobiography Mickey would have written, had he had somebody like me to sit with him and do it. But he had passed on in 1995, and so unfortunately I sort of had to do it myself.

KENNEALLY: Well, your sportswriting career then goes back 35 years or more. What is it about sportswriting today that you admire, and what is it that you find lacking?

GOLENBOCK: Well, that sportswriters I admire are the ones I read. David here is as good as anybody on the planet. And Michael Lewis is – I find amazing. Because what Michael can do, what's just incredible to me – he started off with *Moneyball* interviewing a whole raft of general managers, apparently to write a book about exactly what, I'm not sure. But when he came across Billy Beane of the Oakland A's, he discovered something. And he discovered something very, very important. And he's got this incredible mind, where he takes all of this – it's like sculpturing, where you take a big blob of clay and you sculpture it away until you come up with a Brancusi. And that's what Michael Lewis did.

He had one scene in *Moneyball*, where he's got all the scouts sitting in the room on this side, and he's got this kid sitting over here with a computer. And they're trying to figure out who to draft. So he says to the scout, who should we get? And the scout throws a name out. And Beane goes, nah, I don't think we want him. And so he goes to the guy with the computer, and says who should we get? And he says, well, this guy last year hit so and so, and his on base percentage and so and so, we ought to draft this guy. And the guy goes, OK, we'll draft him. The next scout – and he declines his recommendation. He comes back over to this guy, and he takes his recommendation. Well, before we're done, he fires all the scouts. He determines that the scouting system is ridiculous, and that the guy with the computer with the numbers – the numbers will tell you who to take. And that's what his book was all about. And it was an incredibly revelation.

And the other thing that's amazing, of course, is that today, you've got a number of teams who do what Billy Beane does. And then you've got other teams, like my Tampa Bay Devil Rays, who don't. And you say to yourself, wait a second. Michael Lewis in *Moneyball* has just told every Major League baseball team how to be the most efficient and to be the most smart, why isn't everybody do this? And you discover that baseball has a tradition, which is very, very, very difficult to break. And so teams with young, hip guys, they're more willing to go out on a limb and do something different than the teams with the guys who are not so young and not so hip.

KENNEALLY: And sports now is much more a part of the entertainment culture than really it's own separate world, don't you think?

GOLENBOCK: Well, the thing you discover watching ESPN is that a lot of my contemporaries are now no longer so much writing the sports, but they're the guys.

Tony Kornheiser, who's one of the great sportswriters in America, he's now on TV arguing with Mike Wilbon, who is another of the great sportswriters in America. But now they're making their money being TV talking heads.

MARANISS: Or Buster Olney, who had that –

GOLENBOCK: Or Buster.

MARANISS: – great season covering the Yankees when they first won the World Series, and now –

GOLENBOCK: Buster wrote a fabulous –

MARANISS: – he's on TV.

GOLENBOCK: He wrote a fabulous book on the New York Yankees – Buster's one of the very best. But now Buster's a TV guy.

MARANISS: They're making more money that way.

GOLENBOCK: If I had been –

MARANISS: So that is one of the ways that sportswriting has really diminished.

KENNEALLY: Yes.

GOLENBOCK: I must tell you – it's much more difficult, today, to write about sports in books than it ever was. And I'll tell you – among the reasons is that publishers today now want, more than anything, they want fame. They want celebrity. It's very difficult to write about the 1908 Cubs and find somebody who will actually publish it. I mean, that's a coup. It must be, I'm sure, a fabulous book, because she got that published. But today, they want A-Rod's story. And of course, you as a writer, if you get A-Rod's story – well A-Rod gets \$1 million, he gives you \$50,000 because he's got an agent who wants to make sure that A-Rod gets 110% of the book deal.

KENNEALLY: Right.

GOLENBOCK: You know, it's hard.

KENNEALLY: Do you think the players in 1908 thought of themselves as anything particularly special? They were just having some fun and lucky to get paid for it?

MURPHY: Well, I think the really great players always have a sense of being something special, of being gifted far beyond ordinary mortals. Although I came across a series of newspaper articles that Honus Wagner did, in which he gets very testy at –

he thought people didn't respect the amount of work he did. But he was clearly – I mean frankly, all great athletes are something of freaks. I mean they're just – they can just do things we can't do. I think the big difference is that today, in the major sports, your life is quite separate from the lives that ordinary people lead. Yogi Berra used to go home in the winter and sell suits. And I think that connects you much more.

GOLENBOCK: He was good at it.

MURPHY: But Peter and David –

GOLENBOCK: He was good at it, too.

MURPHY: – actually know – all my guys were dead. (laughter)

(overlapping conversations; inaudible)

MARANISS: Well, most athletes today have a sense of entitlement from age 11. They're separated from the rest of the kids at school. And so by the time they're 18, they do have this – and a lot of – maybe 1% of those will make the Major Leagues or the NBA or the NFL, but – so there's a whole lot of kids who have really traumatic experiences from age 18 to 24, when they realize they're not going to make it. But all of the ones who do make it, that sense of entitlement is even more enhanced. And so then, when they get out of – when their careers end, then they're really in trouble. A lot of them.

GOLENBOCK: Some people have said that basketball's the worst thing that has ever happened to the black community. And the reason for that is, I discovered in my research, that of the high school ball players, one out of every 10,000 high school ball player makes it to the pros. And it may even be less now, because they're going to Europe, to Estonia and places like that, to get professional basketball players. But these kids in the 7th and 8th grade, almost every single one of them, if you interview them, will tell you that they're going to be professional basketball players. And so some sociologists wonder if perhaps they take the basketball away and not make that an option, perhaps some more – some of these kids would study harder, work harder to go to college.

KENNEALLY: Well, on that, I want to thank everybody here, from Lawrence to Golenbock to Murphy to Maraniss, it's a great play, and really enjoyed having you all here. Thank you, as well, for joining us.

(applause)

GOLENBOCK: Thank you.

MURPHY: Thank you very much.

END OF TAPE