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Baseball's Greatest Series: Yankees, Mariners, and the 1995 Matchup That Changed History

Chris Donnelly
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In mid-1995, baseball seemed to be finished as the nation's pastime. A devastating strike ended the 1994 season in mid-August, and no one wanted anything to do with the replacement players that were trotted out for the following Spring Training. The strike was eventually settled, but fan backlash and apathy were at their highest that summer until baseball reclaimed its place in the hearts of Americans, thanks in part to a remarkable American League playoff series that saw two latecomers square off. The once-proud New York Yankees squeaked into their first post-season in fourteen years with the newly devised American League wild card berth. They would face the "refuse to lose" Seattle Mariners, who rallied from fifteen and a half games behind the Angels in mid-August to beat them-in a one-game tie-breaker-and win the Western Division pennant for the first time since the franchise began in 1977.

Chris Donnelly, a graduate of the College of New Jersey and a devoted Yankee fan, puts aside his partisan loyalties to revisit the drama of that epic 1995 series. Donnelly includes dozens of interviews with players, coaches, and other team officials, and many periodical articles to piece together a context that includes useful Yankee and Mariner history and the careers of the participants. His book will be of interest to Yankee and Mariner fans as well as to baseball lovers everywhere, who will enjoy Donnelly's reporting of the "managerial musical chairs" of the early George Steinbrenner era in New York and the antics of "the Boss," the man baseball fans everywhere love to hate. And Donnelly shows how close Seattle came to losing baseball altogether, until this series abruptly changed the city's feelings. He also presents the players, from gritty competitors such as Chris Bosio, Jack McDowell, and Joey Cora, to classy professionals like Tino Martinez, Tony Fernandez, and Bobby Ayala, to genuine stars like homerun hero Ken Griffey, Jr., "Donnie Baseball" Don Mattingly, "Big Unit" Randy Johnson, and the best hitter in baseball at that time, Edgar Martinez.

But the game's the thing in this book. Donnelly skillfully recreates the two Yankee wins, amid the usual theatrics of historic Yankee Stadium in New York, and the three Seattle victories in their "giant mausoleum," the dreaded Kingdome, where two of the games were decided in extra innings and the final game was decided by a come-from-behind, walk-off double in the eleventh. Donnelly offers a play-by-play analysis of strategy that heightens the suspense of the most pivotal moments. In his preface, he claims that this Yanks/Mariners series "was the best baseball I have ever witnessed." After reading his book, fans will understand why.
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