**Cannon, Jason. *Charlie Murphy: The Iconoclastic Showman behind the Chicago Cubs*.**

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Much was made a few years ago of two events: the centennial of Wrigley Field (2014) and the first Cub World Series win in 108 years (2016). Some fans only then learned that the Wrigley family had nothing to do with the team until 1916, nor that any World Series had ever been won by a team resident in Wrigley Field until 2016. More than a few fans remain at best fuzzy on all that still today (notwithstanding the hints provided by W. P. Kinsella in *Shoeless Joe*). Indeed, generations of fans have simply connected the Wrigley family and Wrigley Field with the fabled teams of 1906-1910. Entirely wrong connections.

Jason Cannon has clarified much of that pre-Wrigley history with his new biography of the architect of those teams, Charlie Murphy. (Well, one of the architects: Cannon’s narrative makes clear that Murphy’s money stood behind the team-building decisions of first baseman and manager Frank Chance, known as the Peerless Leader.) Murphy, an almost-accidental owner, bought into the team during the 1905 season, with significant backing from Charles Taft, a Cincinnati businessman and half-brother of William Howard Taft. Murphy had been a reporter in Cincinnati for several years and had come to know businessman Taft well. Early in 1905, Murphy parleyed his reporter’s connections into a job handling public relations for the New York Giants. When the Giants played a series in Chicago in June 1905, he talked with Cub president Jim Hart, who liked Murphy and hinted that the team would soon be up for sale. Murphy’s insider connections let him get a jump on coordinating finances with Charles Taft and others, and by July he was a minority owner and the new president of the team. In half a year, still in his thirties and with little more than “sports reporter” on his resumé, Charlie Murphy vaulted to the top management of the Chicago National League ball club.

The following season, in 1906, the Cubs won the league pennant; in 1907 and 1908, they won the World Series. Deferring to his manager on team needs, Murphy spent the money and made the trades needed to fill gaps pointed out by Chance. Their mutual successes were apparent to anyone watching, and their cooperative approach was healthy for the team, making them winners for several seasons. But the team nucleus aged and egos manifested, with in-fighting disrupting the roster. The team won another pennant in 1910, but then began a slide that would continue slowly downhill, to end only in 1918, when they finally won another league championship. By then, Murphy and Chance were both long gone from the team. By early 1914, Murphy had rubbed some other owners wrong, in part by bending rules within that otherwise tightly knit group. He had worn out his welcome, with his team and in the league. A dispute with one of his few remaining star players, Johnny Evers, led the other owners to force Murphy to sell his stake in the team, setting up the transition to, first, Charles Weeghman, and then the Wrigley family. Popular history would tie the Cubs and the Wrigleys together, for good or ill. Charlie Murphy would largely be forgotten.

His downfall was ignominious, but the reality of Murphy’s tenure as owner can’t be denied. At the end, as Cannon phrases it, “In Murphy’s eight full years as club president, the Cubs earned four pennants, won two World Series championships, and never finished below third place.” Plus, Charlie Murphy left baseball with a substantial personal bankroll. Still just in his mid-forties, he went on to other business, much of it focused on his hometown of Wilmington, Ohio, where he worked to develop the community’s economy. All was anticlimax by this point, though, and he would die of a stroke in 1931, just 63.

Cannon’s book tells this very American story of rags-to-riches and of pride going before a fall. His narrative weaves together elements that place Charlie Murphy in the greater baseball history of the era: player-owner relations, owner-owner relations, league and interleague developments, and the threat to the National and American Leagues posed by the nascent Federal League. The whole is a big story; here, we get one angle of that broader picture. And what a story it is.