Tyler Kepner. *The Grandest Stage: A History of the World Series*. NY: Doubleday, 2022. 310pp. Illus.

In recent years, Tyler Kepner has been working his way up my personal list of top working sportswriters. His 2019 book, *K: A History of Baseball in Ten Pitches*, raised his standing, and *The Grandest Stage*, his latest book, solidifies that status. Kepner is a master of detail who, through research, experience, and a multitude of interviews, develops his arguments and proves his points with endless excellent examples.

Yes, his evidence includes more than a few of the old chestnuts that are part of World Series lore. But no minimalist approach for Kepner. While he trots out all those standard-issue heroes, he never lets you rest thinking these Elysian fields are populated only by those whose names are stitched in gold. The sheer number of minor figures, of unexpected heroes, of Nobodies lost in the mists of time kept me reading. As Kepner walks a reader through box scores and contemporary reports of games gone by, the depth and breadth of wonderful stories, many unheard in decades, becomes clear. Not just the big stars: there are those whose names live through one World Series at bat or inning pitched, the minor players who had a major impact. Most of those so remembered were successful, but the interviews show too that many of those who cost their team the championship are pleased at least to have had their chance in the biggest games.

This history goes beyond players, of course. Managers, whether making decisions by gut or process, get their chapter, recalled for the good decisions and the bad. So too general managers, in a chapter devoted mostly to the years since Major League Baseball made the game a two-season sport: winning a pennant culminates one season, after which (too?) many teams enter a tournament to crown the World Series champ. As several general managers tell Kepner, building a winner for a 162-game season is not the same as building a winner for the randomness of a post-season.

As with the sport itself (even at the culminating level of the World Series), so with Kepner’s book: perfection is hard to come by. I spent decades teaching young people to think big, to stay at a high intellectual level. Over time, I discouraged students from using, I learned to hate, I positively despised listicles and fun facts. Such do nothing to bolster a claim. Put ‘em in a Book of Baseball Lists and Fun Facts, but not in a book with a serious argument. Not *here*. Alas, chapter 7 is called “Potato Chips and a Glass of Champagne: The Ultimate World Series Lists.” Aw, Tyler, say it ain’t so. (Actually, a few of them were interesting. Okay, more than a few. Still.)

Perhaps, though, the exception proves the rule: except for a lapse in judgment toward the end, the book is wonderfully entertaining. That I might think I know something of the sport and its history doesn’t matter. Kepner simply pulls together so much detail about that history that I find myself sometimes overwhelmed by the new material I’d somehow missed over a lifetime of watching and studying. I’ll challenge any fan to find nothing new under this October sun. Then, when you know as I do that Kepner knows baseball, go find a copy of his previous book, *K*, so you can learn what you thought you knew but didn’t about pitching.

Review by Mark D. Noe