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Abstract

This is a review of William C. Kashatus's *Macho Row: The 1993 Phillies and Baseball's Unwritten Code*, an account of the misfit bunch that almost returned World Series glory to the City of Brotherly Love.

Keywords

Review, Macho Row, William C. Kashatus, Philadelphia Phillies, Baseball

Disciplines

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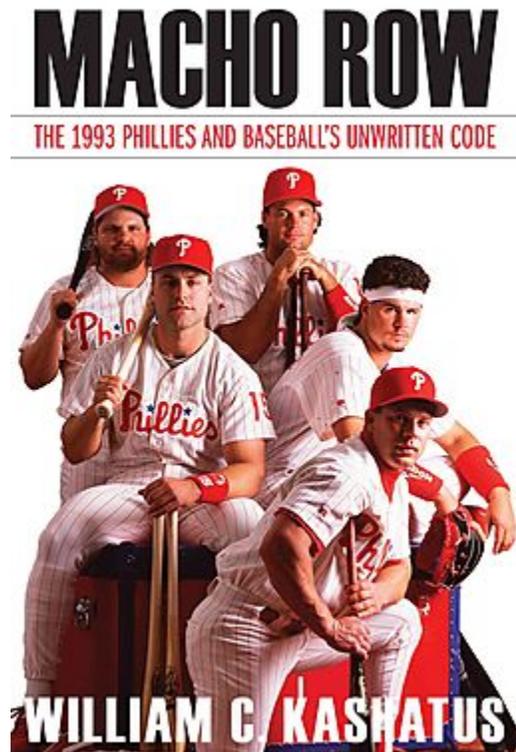
macho row

Reviewed by Jack Ryan, Gettysburg College

5 september 2017

Recent Philadelphia Phillies teams have not been especially memorable. Even the 2008 World Series Champions were dominated by a collection of everyday ballplayers, such as Jimmy Rollins, Chase Utley, and Ryan Howard, who did not generate much interest off the field. This year, the team is on pace to lose one hundred games, but the players remain unknown, except to diehard Phillies fans. This clubhouse dullness was not the case in 1993 when a colorful, reckless, and accomplished collection of players took the Phillies to the World Series only to lose in heartbreaking fashion to the Toronto Blue Jays. The Fighten' Phils had challenged the heavily favored Blue Jays, taking them to a sixth game of the World Series Championship, when Joe Carter went deep in the bottom of the ninth inning to clinch the game and the Series for the Blue Jays. William C. Kashatus, author of *Almost a Dynasty: The Rise and Fall of the 1980 World Champion Philadelphia Phillies* and unabashed Phillies fan, opens *Macho Row: The 1993 Phillies and Baseball's Unwritten Code* with Carter's homerun. By getting the pain out of the way upfront, he can focus on the team and the six players who established their own fraternity inside the locker room, a section of the clubhouse the Philadelphia beat writers called Macho Row.

Philadelphia's macho row, a testosterone and alcohol fueled collection of misfits, was occupied by ballplayers who talked together, drank together, and shared the "Code" together. For diehard Phillies fans, the six members of Macho Row also propelled the baseball club from worst to first in 1993 and almost brought a World Series Championship to the City of Brotherly Love. Macho Row members did not traffic in love; they were baseball players with gritty attitudes, exceptional skills, and unrestrained desires. The 1993 Phillies team, an incorrigible and colorful group challenged the dominant Atlanta Braves for the title "America's Team." A far cry from the clean-cut Braves, the 1993 Phillies were described as "long-haired, pot-bellied and snarly-lipped" and a "motley crew of hairy, beer soused brutes," descriptions that appealed to both the Phillies and their fans (207). Kashatus takes readers inside the Phillies remarkable season by focusing on the six members of Macho Row: Darren "Dutch" Dalton, Lenny "Nails" Dykstra, John "Krukker" Kruk, Mitch "Wild Thing" Williams, Dave "Mikey" Hollins, and Pete "Inky" Incaviglia.



Central to his claim that these six players were throwbacks, lunch-pail characters who played with "pain and reckless abandon, wore their emotions on their sleeves, and could care less about personal appearance," Kashatus insists that the primary reason the '93 Phillies won was because they abided the "Code," which once governed all "aspects of baseball, from hitting, pitching, and base running to dealing with management, umpires, and the media" (xv-xvi). At times, Kashatus romanticizes the attitudes these players displayed, for they had the advantage of a strong union and free agency, which helped to bring a few of them to Philadelphia. One of the major flaws in this book is Kashatus's lack of contemporary perspective, except for the Mitchell Report, a seminal document linking professional baseball players to performance-enhancing drugs. Still, Kashatus details the drive and commitment of this motley crew and reminds his readers how good these players were, even if some of them flamed out after the 1993 season. Billy Beane, who signed with the New York Mets rather than attending Stanford University and became Lenny Dykstra's roommate in the Met's organization, took notice; he understood the '93 Phillies were successful because their hitters took pitches, willingly walked, and therefore created runs. Beane attended the 1993 World Series, and because of this Phillies team, Moneyball thinking was born.

Indeed, the "Phillies exchanged traditional power statistics like homeruns and RBIs for on-base percentage because their general manager, Lee Thomas, did not have the payroll to secure those superstars who could put up big numbers" (237). However, Kashatus offers no evidence proving Thomas consciously constructed a team that would achieve outstanding on-base and slugging percentages. Kashatus does provide ample evidence of how well the members of Macho Row performed in '93: Kruk and Dykstra had on-base percentages above .400, and Daulton and Hollins were above .360. The '93 Phillies also lead the league in walks, which, as Dykstra noted, are "such an underrated stat. ... if I go up there and foul off a lot of balls ... that's very frustrating for him [the pitcher]. ... for his manager and for the players in the field behind him" (240). The '93 Phillies also lead the National League in runs scored: the players got on base, and others knocked them in—a winning combination. Billy Beane, though, is known for using data, metrics that uncover a player's complete value. Lee Thomas, hardly a statistician, took a far more subjective approach; he wanted team chemistry, which resulted in a team made up of proven veterans like Kruk, Incaviglia, Danny Jackson, Jim Eisenreich, and David West, and players that other teams had abandoned, such as Dykstra and Williams. Thomas's philosophy was to allow the players to create their own chemistry. All the major performers for the '93 Phillies had something to prove about themselves, and for one year it catalyzed into the camaraderie of Macho Row.

What bonded the six members of Macho Row was their role playing as outcasts and underdogs, ingredients that created the chemistry Thomas sought, as did their profanity, grumpiness, drinking, drugging, sexual antics, and, perhaps most important, knowledge of baseball. The players referred to their cluttered section of the clubhouse as "the Ghetto." The Philadelphia beat writers called the area Macho Row, a play, perhaps on the 1927 New York Yankees' Murderers' Row, and an attempt to clean up the racist implication of "ghetto." No players of color had a seat in Macho Row, a fact Kashatus never addresses. That said, Macho Row was not open to Curt Shilling either, recognizing him as pompous, arrogant, and a bit of a fraud. The six were comfortable with each other because they had earned their status as outsiders.

Like most male bonding situations, Macho Row turned on their own rather quickly, all it took was Carter's homerun. Kashatus labels this shift "Breaking the Code," his sixteenth and final chapter. "Dykstra and Curt Shilling, the most prominent nonmember of Macho Row," writes Kashatus, "violated the Code shortly after the Phillies lost the World Series" (245). Each player went to the media to castigate Mitch Williams, demanding the organization trade him. Kashatus fails to explain what this violation of the "Code" meant to the Phillies or the clubhouse culture in general. Instead, he explains what happened to the members of "Macho Row." Of the six, John Kruk exited baseball with the most success, becoming a color commentator for ESPN with a folksy on-air style grounded by his knowledge of the game, the players, and the internal machinations of team sports. Lenny Dykstra fared the worst in the court of public opinion, and his travails have been well documented, particularly in his ghostwritten autobiography, *House of Nails: A Memoir of Life on the Edge*.

What truly exposed Macho Row, though, was the release of the "Mitchell Report" in 2007. The report, authored by former U.S. senator George J. Mitchell, identified former and current Major League baseball players who used or were connected to performance-enhancing drugs. "Of the eighty-nine players connected to steroids," writes Kashatus, "the Mitchell report identified Lenny Dykstra and reserve catcher Todd Pratt (not a member of Macho Row but a good neighbor) as the only members of the 1993 Phillies' (255). Typically, Dykstra boasted that his doping made him millions of dollars and helped him lead the Phillies to the World Series. Kashatus also examines the statistics of the other members of Macho Row, and Hollins, Incaviglia, and Daulton had exceptional statistically years when performance-enhancing drugs were in rampant use. In 2011, Curt Shilling, never one to filter his speech, claimed that "steroids were all over" during the 1993 Phillies' season, but "PEDS weren't something you talked about though" (261). Of the members of Macho Row only Mitch Williams and John Kruk remain unstained by performance-enhancing drug allegations. According to Kashatus's definition of the "Code," which prohibits cheating, Williams and Kruk maintained their allegiance to their teammates and the game's unwritten rules.

Macho Row features a lively cast of characters, players that Major League baseball will probably never witness again, for rules, regulations, and policies have changed. Drinking, drugging, and reckless behavior now cost players too much in salary dollars. In the end, Kashatus reveals his empathy for the 1993 Phillies: "Macho Row was an important benchmark in my own life, a point in early adulthood when I was embarking on a career as a historian and a baseball writer. For all these reasons, I still care about them and sympathize with their personal struggles" (267). Kashatus accomplishes the goal he established for himself by chronicling Philadelphia's 1993 season with workman-like proficiency, and his historiography is enhanced by the members of Macho Row. Many Phillies fans will agree with Kashatus's empathetic observations of these players and the 1993 team, especially as the organization endures what will be its sixth consecutive season without a winning record.

Kashatus, William C. *Macho Row: The 1993 Phillies and Baseball's Unwritten Code*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017, 343 pp. 43 photographs.

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