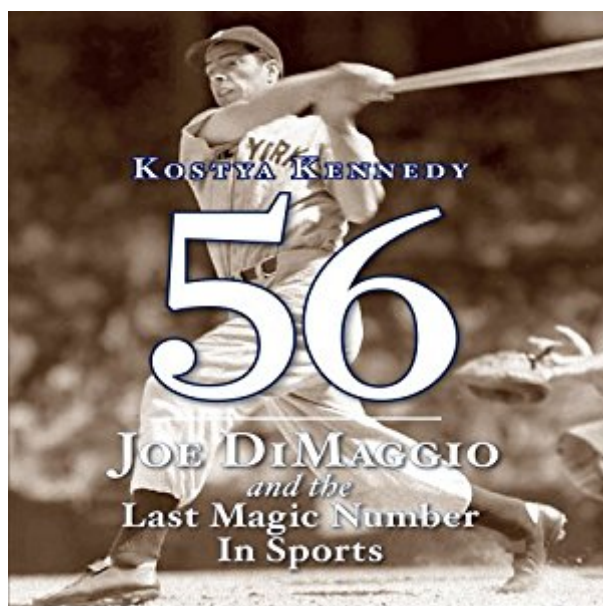


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56: Joe Dimaggio And The Last Magic Number In Sports



Synopsis

Seventy baseball seasons ago, on a May afternoon at Yankee Stadium, Joe DiMaggio lined a hard single to left field. It was the quiet beginning to the most resonant baseball achievement of all time. Starting that day, the vaunted Yankee center fielder kept on hitting - at least one hit in game after game after game. In the summer of 1941, as Nazi forces moved relentlessly across Europe and young American men were drafted by the millions, it seemed only a matter of time before the U.S. went to war. The nation was apprehensive. Yet for two months in that tense summer, America was captivated by DiMaggio's astonishing hitting streak. In 56, Kostya Kennedy tells the remarkable story of how the streak found its way into countless lives, from the Italian kitchens of Newark to the playgrounds of Queens to the San Francisco streets of North Beach; from the Oval Office of FDR to the Upper West Side apartment where Joe's first wife, Dorothy, the movie starlet, was expecting a child. In this crisp, evocative narrative Joe DiMaggio emerges in a previously unseen light, a 26-year-old on the cusp of becoming an icon. He comes alive - a driven ballplayer, a mercurial star and a conflicted husband - as the tension and the scrutiny upon him build with each passing day. DiMaggio's achievement lives on as the greatest of sports records. Alongside the story of DiMaggio's dramatic quest, Kennedy deftly examines the peculiar nature of hitting streaks and with an incisive, modern-day perspective gets inside the number itself, as its sheer improbability heightens both the math and the magic of 56 games in a row.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The first indication I was in for a special treat came from reading the recommendations on the back cover from the likes of Roger Kahn, Richard Ben Cramer, Bob Costas, Tom Verducci, and Leigh Montville. Author Kostya Kennedy has certainly enriched the baseball library with his book entitled 56, in relation to Joe DiMaggio's record-breaking hitting streak in that historical year of 1941. Other books have been written about this event, but this book is the one by which all others will be measured. This is more than a recounting of the games in which the Yankee Clipper swatted his way into the baseball history books. We are also provided with the relationship with his wife, the former Dorothy Arnold who cheered her husband along. When their child was born in October of 1941 things changed between the two partners with a divorce eventually ensuing. The death of Yankee great Lou Gehrig took place on June 2nd during the early stages of the streak, and author Kennedy relates tidbits about Gehrig I hadn't read in numerous other accounts of the Iron Horse. This is also the story of Joe's relationship with brother Dominic, the center fielder of the Boston Red Sox and his superstar teammate Ted Williams who went on to hit an astounding .406 that year. While DiMaggio may have appeared to be calm and regal as he went about his business during the streak he was churning up inside. The first goal he was to take aim at was George Sisler of the St. Louis Browns who hit in 41 consecutive games in 1922, then came Willie Keeler's streak of 44 consecutive games with the Baltimore Orioles in 1897. DiMaggio also had to deal with the likes of former Yankee pitcher Johnny Babich, who sought revenge on his former team by attempting to walk the streaking DiMaggio rather than let him hit if he could retire him in his first at bat. On his second at bat Joe swung at a bad 3-0 pitch and hit a scalding liner back at Babich for a solid hit to put an end to that strategy. Author Kennedy takes us back to the year 1941 which belonged to both DiMaggio with his magical 56 and Ted Williams' magical .406. You mention both numbers and any self-respecting baseball fan will immediately know what you are referring to. World War II was raging in Europe, and America would enter in the waning days of that year. Bits of information are also provided on Willie Keeler that I haven't read in a baseball book since reading The National League Story by the late Hall of Fame historian Lee Allen. Pete Rose's streak is also dealt with along with Rose's post-game career of selling his wares to fans. Is DiMaggio's 56 game hitting streak the ultimate baseball record never to be broken? It certainly added to the mystique of Joe DiMaggio. Will anyone bat .400 again as Teddy Ballgame did in 1941? Both of these events took place in the same year of 1941. DiMaggio was awarded the MVP over Williams, possibly because the Yankees won the pennant. As an aside I might say that Cy Young's 511 victories is the ultimate record never to be broken. A pitcher who won 20 games for 20 years would still be 111 wins short of Cy Young. Certainly with pitchers pitching every 5th day this is highly unlikely to take place. I did find one minor

error in the book. On page 279 the author quotes the words on Lou Gehrig's plaque which was unveiled at Yankee Stadium on July 4th, 1941. The word "former" does not appear on the plaque. If you are a baseball fan I assure you this book is a gem. Buy it with confidence. I hope author Kostya Kennedy has other historical baseball books to follow. He is an author to keep an eye on.

In the summer of 1941, the United States was preparing for war. Germany had invaded Russia, and Roosevelt was about to put an embargo on oil shipments to Japan. On the home front, two baseball players were about to etch their names in baseball immortality: Ted Williams and Joe DiMaggio. By the end of the season, Williams compiled a .406 batting average. No one has come close to .400 since then. DiMaggio had a little streak of his own that summer; he hit safely in 56 straight games. In this fine book, author Kostya Kennedy describes that magical baseball summer and how DiMaggio set a standard which, in all likelihood, will never be equaled. For two straight months, DiMaggio came to the ballpark, and for two straight months, he hit. Some games, he would get his hit in his first at-bat; others, it would be in his final at-bat. There were questionable events along the way that helped keep the streak alive, such as the official scorer ruling a potential error a hit, and an opposing pitcher's decision to go against his manager and pitch to DiMaggio rather than walk him. As the streak grew in length, Joe was mobbed by fans in every stadium he played in, but none more so than Yankee Stadium. After each game, fans would run onto the field and try to steal his cap or pat him on the back (imagine fans trying to do that today). A song was written about Joe by Les Brown that became a big hit. Finally, in the sweltering heat of July, the Yankees traveled to Cleveland for a series with the Indians. DiMaggio had extended his streak to 56 games, and was looking for more, but he ran up against two fine pitchers, and Ken Keltner, the Indians' 3rd baseman, made two spectacular defensive plays, taking away a sure hit each time. Just like that, the streak ended. But DiMaggio hit in 16 straight games afterward. I've been a big baseball fan my entire life, and I've read books about Roger Maris and Mickey Mantle, but this great book is the best I've read so far. Not only does Kostya Kennedy go into great detail about Joe's streak, he also introduces the reader to Joe's teammates, including Lefty Gomez and Phil Rizzuto. The reader also gets a glimpse into Joe's private life as well. One of the best aspects of the book is Kennedy's "The View From Here" chapters he included. These informative chapters include analysis on DiMaggio's streak as well as Pete Rose's 44-game run in 1978. I give "56" my highest recommendation. Baseball fans will love this great book.

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