



Pudge: The Biography of Carlton Fisk

Doug Wilson

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Carlton Fisk retired having played in more games and hit more home runs than any other catcher before him. A baseball superstar in the 1970s and 80s, Fisk was known not just for his dedication to the sport and tremendous plays but for the respect with which he treated the game.

A homegrown icon, Fisk rapidly became the face of one of the most storied teams in baseball, the Boston Red Sox of the 1970s. As a rookie making only \$12,000 a year, he became the first player to unanimously win the American League Rookie of the Year award in 1972, upping both his pay grade and national recognition. Fisk's game-winning home run in Game Six of the hotly-contested 1975 World Series forever immortalized him in one of the sport's most exciting televised moments. Fisk played through an epic period of player-owner relations, including the dawn of free agency, strikes, and collusions. After leaving Boston under controversy in 1981, he joined the Chicago White Sox, where he played for 12 more major league seasons, solidifying his position as one of the best catchers of all time.

Doug Wilson, finalist for both the Casey Award and Seymour Medal for his previous baseball biographies, uses his own extensive research and interviews with childhood friends and major league teammates to examine the life and career of a leader who followed a strict code and played with fierce determination.

Pudge: The Biography of Carlton Fisk Details

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David Lucander says

This is a wonderful book, and a deceptively fast read. Bias alert: I'm a native New Englander and lifelong Red Sox fan. Yes, I loved this book. Fisk represents the kind of New England grit that characterizes the best of this region, it's hard NOT to like this bio. The prose is awesome, and the writing is a nice mix of regional history/insider anecdotes/and basic sports history. I liked this more than Ortiz's memoir and both Ted Williams biographies. A must read for any sports fan from the upper right, and a great gift for opening day (it's coming soon). I was born in 1980, reading this made me feel like I was reliving a lot of my dad's memories - that makes it a good book for fans from just about any generation. Doug Wilson is such an engaging sportswriter that I just bought his biography of Brooks Robinson and can't wait to read it this summer.

Peter Murray says

This is the story of one of my all time favorite Red Sox, Carlton Pudge Fisk and what it took for him to survive in the majors during a time when the game was changing. We follow Pudge from his earliest days of playing High School Basketball and Baseball in New Hampshire and Vermont. We read his struggles with the minors and how he made the show and later his struggles keeping on the Roster. It is an interesting look into the life of a Catcher and how he built a Hall Of Fame resume.

Fred says

Every Hall of Famer needs a biography and this is the first full length biography of Carlton Fisk. It is a straightforward account of pretty remarkable baseball life. It starts and ends with Fisk's most memorable moment in the sixth game of the 1975 World Series. It is hard to overstate how important that homer was both to Fisk and to baseball. Many consider it the greatest televised sports moment in history because of what it meant and how it changed the way we view sports. Wilson reminds us that before Fisk's homer camera men never went for a "reaction shot." They followed the action. But because of some unique aspects to that telecast one camera man was able to stay focused on Fisk bouncing down the first base line waving the ball fair. People loved it for its pure spontaneity and we have had reaction shots ever since (the camera man won an Emmy). But Fisk's career was about more than that homer. The biography reminds you just how good a hitter Fisk was and his solid defense, throwing and ability to call a game. He caught more games and hit more homers than any other catcher. He was a hard working, confident, confrontational, no-nonsense ball player. There are good chapters in this book about the 1978 collapse, the collusion of the owners in 1985 and Fisk's rivalry with Thurmon Munson. For someone like me who grew up loving Fisk and the 1975 Red Sox team, this is must reading.

James Hansee says

Growing up as a Red Sox fan in the 70's and 80's I was really able to connect well to this book. It was a confirming look at the Carlton Fisk that fans remembered, but it also highlighted his family which would be new to many readers. This was an enjoyable read and the author did an excellent job of weaving in quotes and comments into the narrative.

Jim Blessing says

Excellent book about Carlton Fisk.

Jane says

Baseball is my favorite sport, and Carlton Fisk is my favorite baseball player. I named my first car Carlton Fisk, and for the seven years I owned it I had a little cardboard pop-up Carlton Fisk affixed to the dashboard. (It was a good thing I decided to buy a bunch of them, as I had to replace the figure each year due to fading from the sun.)

I just finished the extremely enjoyable book Pudge: The Biography of Carlton Fisk by Doug Wilson. Although Fisk was not interviewed for the book – participating in the writing of his own biography would be too much like bragging for Fisk – it is not a tell all. Or maybe there is no all to tell regarding Fisk. If you are looking for dirt on Carlton Fisk - if there is dirt on Carlton Fisk - don't look here. Pudge is not that book. It is a glowing love letter to New England's greatest professional baseball player. The author is an unabashed admirer of Fisk, and since I am also, I loved the book. My coworker rolled his eyes when I read this passage outloud:

He was a man who undeniably exemplified all the attributes they wanted to believe about themselves as New Englanders: he was tough, independent, and principled. Stoic and in control, he spoke what he believed, said what needed to be said and little else. He was Calvin Coolidge in John Wayne's body. And his posture: tall, ramrod straight; just hand him a musket and he could pose for a statue of a minuteman, keeping faithful watch to protect the citizens from tyranny, marauders, and even Yankees. (p. 81)

Pudge is also not for you if you are looking for a quick look at Fisk's life and career. The book goes into great detail about Fisk's years with the Red Sox and the White Sox and especially that famous home run in the 1975 World Series. However, if, like me, you loved watching Fisk play, you admire his work ethic, you think the White Sox mistreated him, and you wish professional sports had more players like Fisk, you will probably enjoy reading Pudge.

Brian Andrewsone says

I used to go to old Comiskey park on the south side of Chicago. Old number 72 was an icon, a leader a mainstay. This book did him justice and is for sports fans in general, especially redsox and whitesox fans this is a must read.

Lance says

Great read. Full review will be posted on publication day

Steve says

Call him “a lion in winter.” Call him “an iron man.” But, where in the world did he get the nickname “Pudge?” As biographer Doug Wilson explains it, Carlton Fisk “would never know a time when he was called anything other than Pudge or Pudgy. The exact origin of the name remains a mystery, even to him.” Be that as it may, I didn’t get to watch the Boston Red Sox or the Chicago White Sox that much during Fisk’s playing days. But, I don’t recall the electronic media, at least, referring to the iconic catcher as anything but Carlton. Thanks to Wilson, that was all new to me.

Nor did I know that since his forced retirement from Major League Baseball in 1993, Carlton has become a major orchid grower. Wilson reports, “By 2010 he had (raised) 40 different varieties and more than 300 orchids in total.” Whodathunkit? “One of the toughest baseball players who ever grappled in the dirt around home plate . . . (is now) playing with flowers.”

The nickname and the orchids were my two takeaways from this Carlton Fisk biography. Who knew? Well, there was a third news nugget for me. I was totally unaware of the iconic nature of game three of the 1975 World Series, (The Reds’ Ed Armbrister’s controversial collision with Boston’s Fisk after an attempted bunt), and game six of the same series, (Fisk’s dramatic home run in the 12th inning and his reaction to the blast caught on live television.) As Wilson writes, “It became an all-time classic; one of the most memorable and iconic shots in television sports history . . . Forever after, there would be the isolation shot, looking for the reaction of the athlete to what happened.”

Wilson’s portrait of Fisk is an important sports bio if for no other reason than it’s a study in contrasts between the MLB player of Fisk’s era and the 21st Century athlete. With the introduction of binding arbitration, reserve clauses, free agency and the rise of sports agents, MLB had forever changed the relationship between team owners and their players. “Salary beefs . . . would become ubiquitous. The more (the players) got, the more they wanted; and the more they wanted, the more fans expected.” Wilson writes, “A lot of the fun left the game of baseball.” Somehow, Fisk apparently rose above all that. According to Wilson, Fisk’s “fierce pride and passion for playing the game of baseball the right way never wavered.”

Wilson does a first rate job in capturing the personality of a Hall of Fame catcher who carried the reputation during his 24-year professional career as someone “hard to get to know.” In fact, Wilson writes, “Throughout his career Carlton allowed people to know only what he wanted them to know; now he allowed even less. He rarely gave interviews.” That might explain why Fisk is quoted here primarily from newspaper columns, articles and clippings. I found very little evidence that Wilson had ever talked to Fisk one-on-one for this publication. That could be this sports memoir’s biggest weakness.

Tom Gase says

Another good bio baseball book by Doug Wilson, who wrote very good books on Brooks Robinson and The Bird. This one I liked the least, but only because the other two were so great. This book on Carlton "Pudge" Fisk is well researched and written well. Talks equally about his days in Boston playing for the Red Sox and also his days in the 1980's playing for the Chicago White Sox. Info on the White Sox I didn't know much about, so that was interesting. So were the portions of the book dedicated to Fisk and Thurman Munson of the Yankees. Heartbreaking in a way when Munson died, you realized later, especially in the section on Deion Sanders, that the two were actually very much alike and probably would have ended up being friends later on. How Wilson ends the book with the portion talking about "Good Will Hunting" was also well done. Good stuff again by Wilson, can't wait to read his next one. Red Sox and White Sox fans should read this book.

Jim says

I am a fan of Doug Wilson writings so I like this book especially the chapter on the 1975 World Series and how the camera caught Pudge's reaction to his home run. The only problem I had with the book was the lack of interviews with Pudge but he doesn't do interviews. I won this book on Goodreads.

Harold Kasselmann says

It begins and ends with the same transformative moment; not only for Pudge, but also the sport for which he dedicated his life. That iconic moment of game six of the 1975 World Series when Red Sox fans would come so close to bliss but fall one game shy. That legendary camera shot that would garner an Emmy for the cameraman and change the way games would forever be covered has never faded from memory. Carlton Fisk jumping and hopping sideways towards first base and flailing his arms to keep the ball fair. It's been forty years and so much has changed in the game; perhaps in part because of that home run and the unprecedented television audience and interest in the game. In this fascinating biography the reader comes as close as perhaps anyone can come to understand what made Carlton Fisk a Hall OF Famer and one of the greatest catchers of all time during a twenty four year career.

The son of a demanding stoic New Englander from the independent breed of New Hampshire residents, Carlton inherited his father's quest for perfection, blue collar work habits, and an adherence to a principled and accountable life style. As Wilson suggests, neither he or his father would have countenanced trophies for little leaguers who merely showed up for the games. He was in Wilson's perception, John Wayne and Calvin Coolidge combined. And competition was in his DNA. Likely it was so because he needed praise from his dad even in his late adulthood. He admitted as much at his Hall of Fame induction. Carlton Fisk would not back down from a fight, a runner barreling into him from third base, or a matter of principle. He was the epitome of old school at a time when players were demanding to re-negotiate contracts. He disdained "bling" baseball players (Deion Sander) or anyone else who disrespected the game by flaunting or not giving 100% all of the time. And he didn't care if he alienated another player, a manager or ownership if they didn't play by the rules and by his standard of excellence. Here was a guy that rehabilitated a grossly torn up knee in 1974 by himself. Then imagine a player over 40 lifting weights until 1:00 A.M. after a game so that his body could endure twenty four years in a crouched position. (he won a silver slugger award at age 37 by virtue of

his dedication to excellence and his physical well-being.)

Carlton "Pudge" Fisk played more games at his position than any man in history and when you read this captivating biography you will understand why he was able to do it. And you will marvel at just how underappreciated, undervalued, and exploited the man was by both Red Sox and White Sox ownership. Wilson does not portray Fisk as blameless. He could be difficult, blunt, stubborn, and fiercely independent, but he was accountable and dedicated to his team and his craft.

In full disclosure, I received this advanced copy from the publisher. Nevertheless, I simply can't say enough good things to depict how good of a biography it really is. The chapter about the 1975 World Series was exciting and vivid and I had seen it in real time. The animosity, okay hatred, between the Sox and Yankees during those years is covered. The famous brawls at the plate with Munson, and the Pinella- Michaels- Rivers- Bill Lee and Graig Nettles bout is also brought to life during the Red Sox years. The White Sox years, where Fisk helped build a division winner, made for great reading and fun. Those were happy years, and despite never having made a close friend in either clubhouse, they were fruitful times for Fisk.

As for the writing style, it's smart, humorous, and poignant-especially the final chapter. I came away with the distinct impression that the author Doug Wilson deeply admired his subject. After reading and loving this account, I too came away with a deep admiration for Fisk and Doug Wilson.

Marie E. Bubelenyi says

The greatest catcher ever to strap on the gear

Carlton Fisk has been my favorite baseball player since I first fell in love with the game and with the Chicago White Sox. I loved the way he hit, the way he handled pitchers, and his commanding presence on the field. (He was also quite good looking.) This book captures the essence of that commanding, dedicated, and devoted player I remember so well. It gave me an insight into his life before the White Sox and helped me relive some of his greatest moments with the White Sox, several of which I was able to see first hand. I highly recommend this book to anyone who is a fan of Mr. Fisk, of either Sox team, or of baseball in general.

Michael Brouses says

Informative book detailing the life of Carlton Fisk. I was a fan of him when he was with the White Sox not realizing any of his time with the Red Sox. Was nice to read about his history and his work ethic which you don't see alot of in the current age we are living in.

Joshua says

Not just the story of one of the best catchers to play the game. also contains interesting details of the Red Sox, White Sox during his career as well as the changes happening in baseball in the 70's and 80's.

