



Sandy Koufax: A Lefty's Legacy

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“The incomparable and mysterious Sandy Koufax is revealed.... This is an absorbing book, beautifully written.” —*Wall Street Journal*

“Leavy has hit it out of the park...A lot more than a biography. It’s a consideration of how we create our heroes, and how this hero’s self perception distinguishes him from nearly every other great athlete in living memory... a remarkably rich portrait.” — *Time*

The instant *New York Times* bestseller about the baseball legend and famously reclusive Dodgers’ pitcher Sandy Koufax, from award-winning former *Washington Post* sportswriter Jane Leavy. *Sandy Koufax* reveals, for the first time, what drove the three-time Cy Young award winner to the pinnacle of baseball and then—just as quickly—into self-imposed exile.

Sandy Koufax: A Lefty's Legacy Details

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Author : Jane Leavy

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From Reader Review Sandy Koufax: A Lefty's Legacy for online ebook

Carol Storm says

Gave up after twenty pages -- listening to everyone who grew up on Koufax's block talk about how wonderful the "old neighborhood" was made me want to throw up. It was like a circle-jerk.

Chris Gager says

Starting tonight after work - perhaps. Something light after "Canada".

And done in a couple of days. It's an enjoyable "puffy" kind of look at a short-term great pitcher. No mysteries about Koufax are cleared up, such as whether or not he's a closeted gay man (not that there's anything wrong with that). She never mentions it. I was never a big fan because he was in the National League and because of my Red Sox I was American League all the way. Still, I have to admit that by reading this I'm more of a fan now. I remember in 1963 at boarding school there was an underclassman named Richard Sherman (Jewish) who was a huge Koufax/Dodger fan. I never got that whole connection either, between Sandy and his Jewish roots and his Brooklyn fan base. Come to think of it there were plenty of things I didn't get back then. Oh well... As for his place in MLB pitching history he's right up there of course. Nobody dominated like he did but it was for such a short period of time. Warren Spahn (a lefty) won 200 more games than Koufax and Steve Carlton must be considered too. My own personal favorite pitcher is Nolan Ryan (7 no-hitters but no perfectos due to his wildness). No doubt this is partly because he was on the staff of the two Strat-O-Matic teams I had that won championships. He "pitched" a no-hitter in one of those playoff runs.

Andy Miller says

This would have been a lot better book if the author, Jane Leavy, had more focus on Sandy Koufax instead of her repeated asides, tangents and pages about Koufax fans that were scattered throughout the book.

Koufax's story is compelling and the author does include some good perspectives, my favorite is dispelling the commonly held notion (including myself) that Koufax was a wild, unpredictable pitcher early in his career who could not be counted on. Leavy showed that instead Koufax's often uneven performance was the result of poor managing, Koufax would pitch a complete game shutout and then not be used for the next three weeks and when used would be bounced between bullpen and rotation. Another great perspective was about how Koufax should be viewed in history, contrasting Bob Gibson's statement that Koufax's career was too short to be considered the top pitcher of his generation contrasted with Willie Mays who said Koufax shouldn't be penalized for accomplishing in five years what others took 20 years to accomplish.

Leavy also explains Koufax as an introvert not as an aloof snob and traces great character, especially his refusal to commercialize on his fame. I wish there was more time and emphasis on his faith and refusal to play on Yom Kippur even when it fell during the World Series which showed great character that we see far too seldom.

Steven Peterson says

Jane Leavy has written a fine work on Mickey Mantle recently. She authored this work in 2002. It is a fascinating examination of one of the best pitchers that I have ever watched (on TV only, I'm sorry to say).

The book begins with Koufax working with the Dodgers in 1997. The book goes back and forth in time--and it doesn't seem distracting to me. The perfect game that Koufax authored against the Cubs cuts in and out as Leavy relates the early years and developing career of Koufax. We get a better picture of why he retired and what he did after his retirement, including his quiet involvement with baseball thereafter.

Many interviews enrich the narrative, as we get a sense of what people thought at each stage of Koufax' career. We also get a sense of the pitcher as a person--and, for the most part, he comes off pretty well.

In short, a nice sports biography, with considerable emphasis on Koufax the person rather than just Koufax the pitcher.

Some pluses: a nice interview that Sports Illustrated carried out with Leavy; Koufax's pitching statistics from his all too brief career (on page 276).

Heather Jacks says

A Lefty's Legacy

Anyone who spends more than ten minutes with me knows that I am a huge baseball fan. I love the game; the history, the stories, the smell of fresh cut grass, that moment of mystical silence when the catcher has given the signal and the pitcher has accepted it, followed by that magical moment when the field of potentiality is wide open and anything can happen. The pitcher winds up, muscles rippling in weird physiologic perfection that is almost alien. That being said; I read a lot of baseball books, which brings me to Sandy Koufax: A Lefty's Legacy, by Jane Leavy.

Let me state upfront: I am in the minority. I did not enjoy this book. As I closed the final page, I was left sadly unfulfilled and disappointed. I probably wouldn't have even finished this book, had it not been for that pesky New Year's resolution I made; to finish books that I start, even if I don't like them, and then figure out and articulate my reason for said displeasure.

The reviews are overwhelmingly positive, but then again, the subject matter is Sandy Koufax, a left handed pitcher who is arguably one of the best players the game has ever seen; the youngest player ever elected into the Baseball Hall of Fame, the first 3-time Cy Young winner in baseball history and the only one to win 3 times when the award was for all of baseball, not just one league. He was the first major leaguer to pitch four no-hitters (including the eighth perfect game in baseball history), amongst many other accolades. These things are barely--(if at all) mentioned in the book. In *The Glory of Their Times*—(possibly one of the best baseball books ever written), Harry Hooper says, "...and that Koufax. You name a better left hander in the history of baseball and I'll eat my hat."

I was excited to read the book, so when I got to a page numbered xviii in the Preface, with this quote, “Hi, Ms. Leavy, this is Sandy, uh, Koufax. I don’t really have any interest in this project...” I was on alert, but I wasn't sure what to make of it. Perhaps Sandy would come around and ultimately embrace the project, participating fully and sharing little known stories of the game. Alas, that was not to be. What the line meant, was exactly what it said. Ms. Leavy goes on to justify the 269 page book, by interviewing 469 friends and acquaintances of Sandy Koufax, making some observations about the game, social history and civil persuasions of the era; all which can be found in any Google search or Wikipedia entry.

Sandy Koufax is well known for not pitching the first game of the 1965 World Series due to the fact that it fell on Yom Kippur. This monumental act, which transcends the field, making Sandy Koufax as big on the field as off, receives approximately one paragraph—unless you include the comments from two random Rabbis’.

In reading the book, I felt like Ms. Leavy had been given a book contract, signed on the line that was dotted and subsequent to that, received a ‘no interest’ clause from Sandy Koufax himself; because his voice is strangely absent in a book titled; Sandy Koufax: A Lefty's Legacy. Maybe she paced around her kitchen, nervously chewing pencil erasers. What could she do? She had a contract; she had to write a book—any book. I, of course have no proof that such a thing occurred, but, it would seem a plausible explanation.

I bleed Orange and Black, which almost necessarily dictates that I am NOT a fan of the Dodgers. However, I am a fan of baseball, and I think one of the greatest players who have ever graced the game, Sandy Koufax deserved better. I would be willing to eat my hat over it.

Conor Mullaney says

This is a very interesting book that tells the story of the great Sandy Koufax from the beginning. It tells a story that you wouldn't expect would come from such a dominant pitcher in baseball's history. The main subject is about the fantastic pitching ability of Sandy and how he was able to perfect his craft in a way that was ahead of the science of the sport of baseball. Most observations have been about the key points in Sandy's mechanics and how they all work together to create an end result that blew everyone away. It also tells a great a story of how to overcome adversity and become a legend in the world. This book deals a lot with anti-Semitism in America and how it affected baseball and its few Jewish players.

My experience with the book was great! I loved it because I learned so much, not only about Sandy Koufax but about how to better my own pitching mechanics. I think the author wrote the book with an end to beginning feel because she wanted to start the book off with memories and stories of how Sandy was so great and then she could go into depth on how he got to the top. The language that the author uses is very passionate. It is as if she is writing with all the awe and amazement that comes with seeing Sandy for the first time. Also the author not only writes with her point of view but with the points of view of the many players that Sandy played with and against all throughout his life. Everyone that is quoted in the book is talking about Sandy in a positive and amazed way.

"Koufax's fastball inspired scientific debate, pitting the empiricism of the batting eye against scientific principle. The laws of physics and logic dictate that an object hurtling through space must lose height and momentum. Anyone can make a Whiffle ball rise, sure. But a man standing on a fifteen-inch-high mound of dirt throwing a five-ounce horsehide sphere downhill? 'Rise, my butt,' Roseboro, the skeptic says." This passage is important because it shows that Sandy Koufax was able was able to perfect his pitching in such a way that it defied physics and caused arguments in the scientific world of baseball. Also he made even the

most sane and perfect sighted men go crazy whenever he pitched and all you could do was say, wow, let me see that again!

"Jackie Robinson, then in his final season, clashed with Alston on many subjects, including Koufax. Villante, who was affiliated with the Dodgers throughout the fifties and sixties, said, 'The one thing about Jackie was, no matter who the hell you were, Jackie appreciated talent. If you were good, he was on your side. I think he saw that in Sandy... Jackie always thought Alston was dumb. And the very fact that Sandy would every so often show this terrific flash of brilliance and pitch a terrific game and not pitch again for thirty days would add to Jackie saying how dumb this guy was.'" This passage shows significance to me because even though Sandy wasn't at peak performance yet and even though no one high up in the Dodger's organization trusted him enough to pitch regularly, a baseball great believed in him and protected him and pushed him to achieve the greatness he knew he had in him.

I loved it because I got to learn so much about one of the greatest, if not the greatest, pitchers of all time. It was really interesting to see how Sandy developed himself into the pitching phenomenon that he was and also into the great, honest and kind man that everyone looked up to. I would highly recommend this book to anyone and everyone that has any desire to learn about Sandy Koufax, to further their general knowledge of the time of baseball displayed in the book, or someone who wants to read about the story of a person who fought a hard battle against religious adversity and would like to learn how to overcome their own.

What I have learned from this book is that anyone can achieve something if they put their mind to it and have the strong will to compete for their goal and get on top. This book shows you that even through the toughest times of adversity; the strong will excel and rise above those that torment him. This book deals a lot with anti-Semitism in America and how it affected baseball and its few Jewish players. The consequences of this book are aimed more toward the people that taunted and belittled Sandy Koufax and his fellow Jewish, black and Hispanic ball players because they showed that the hateful words had little effect on them and they rose to become some of the best, if not the best, players at their position. Even though Sandy was looked down upon by the Dodgers' manager and fans, he kept with his craft and perfected it so when he got his chance he would show everyone that they were wrong and that he couldn't be pushed aside. These issues do not affect my life personally now or probably not even in the future but that doesn't mean it doesn't affect other people today or affect them in their futures. I wish people wouldn't disparage others because of how they look or because of what they believe in because in the end the people they make fun of are usually on a higher level than they are whether it's in a particular sport or occupation. They are always on a higher level than they are in a humanity stand point.

Robert Greenberger says

I was just a kid when Sandy Koufax was the greatest pitcher of his era. I am told I was taken to see him pitch a night game against the Mets, although I recall the game, not the lean, fireballer on the mound. But I have since come to know his legacy and impact on the game.

I've been meaning to read Jean Leavy's thoughtful biography since it was released in 2002 and am glad I finally got to it. Considering Koufax didn't actively participate, this is a well-handled look into the life and events that shaped him. In some ways, he's a living Rorschach test as people see what they want in him, but the accomplishments more than speak for themselves.

It's a good look at what baseball was like in the 1950s and 1960s, as it began to morph just as he was exiting. He was overlooked and underused early on, delaying his evolution, but once he got regular work, he quickly

dominated the game in an era when there were many excellent pitchers and batters at work.

There were dozens of people interviewed providing a well-rounded look at the athlete, which made for entertaining reading.

Joy D says

Non-fiction about the legendary Dodgers' pitcher Sandy Koufax. It is told in alternating chapters of one of his best pitching performances and biographical insights. The author sets the record straight regarding several myths. It harkens back to an earlier age in baseball, prior to free agency, when "bonus babies" were required to remain on the major league team even if it would have served everyone better to go through the learning experiences in the minor leagues. It covers a wide range of topics, including his Jewish faith, friendships with other players, integrity, and accomplishments. It raises questions of how much better he could have been if not mishandled by the Dodgers early in his career. It sheds light on decisions such as the joint hold-out with Don Drysdale and why he retired when he did. I was astounded at the extremes he endured to deal with the pain in his arm, near the end of his career, while still managing to attain spectacular results.

The author weaves together many interviews from players, fans, and management to provide a fascinating picture of an interesting man. This is not a typical biography, as in it does not follow a linear progression through his life, but instead contains social commentary about the times and stories from his life that highlight his personal qualities. Overall, I found it an enjoyable read. Recommended to baseball fans interested in learning more about the life of Sandy Koufax.

Phillip says

A great book about a great pitcher and a good guy. Koufax was so much better than anyone else in the league there's only ever been one pitcher that has approximated his success over a short time period. Well written in a clever format. If you like baseball, and like the Koufax era, you'll enjoy this book.

Ray says

This one surprised me. Harper Collins' cheap packaging and the uninspired title (*A Lefty's Legacy?*) screamed formulaic hagiography. You know the genre: lots of stats, cheesy writing, exclamation points...

Instead this is as subtle, probing, smartly written as any biography could be. Jane Leavy is a skillful researcher with a relentless drive to get at her subject from every angle. And she knows how to tell her story. She is a masterful writer, able to draw us in to her quest. We are led to discover aspects of this man through a process that mirrors her own.

As others have noted this is more than a simple biography of Koufax. It really uses Koufax as a lens to do some significant social history. In the process we are led through some critical reflections on Jewish identity, baseball, physiology, American values, etc.

Truly one of the most compelling things I have ever read. It really deserved a better title, and pages that don't yellow on the edges after just three years.

Mary says

I was very let down by this book. Sandy Koufax was a great pitcher, an inspirational human being, and is a hero to many people (including myself). But this book is just a big heaping mess of hero-worship (hagiography). It was a one-dimensional look at a man who is very complex and enigmatic.

I thought the structure of the book was interesting, alternating the innings of Koufax's perfect game with more biographical chapters. But that's about it. I know there's some other Sandy Koufax literature out there. Maybe they do a better job of living up to the subject.

Mark Taylor says

Although Sandy Koufax only played professional baseball for twelve years, he still ranks as one of the most legendary baseball players of the 20th century. Koufax came up with the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1955. He had a blazing fastball, but not much control over it. After the 1960 season, Koufax's record was 36-40. His ERA was 4.10. From 1961 to 1966, Sandy Koufax simply dominated opposing batters. His record was 129-47, an incredible winning percentage of .733. His ERA had gone down to 2.76.

Koufax won 3 Cy Young Awards, in 1963, 1965, and 1966, at a time when the award was given to just one pitcher, rather than one in each league. He was the unanimous winner each time. All three years Koufax won the Cy Young Award he also won the pitching Triple Crown, leading the league in strikeouts, wins, and ERA. Koufax was the NL MVP in 1963, and finished second in the voting in 1965 and 1966. He led the NL in ERA five years in a row, from 1962-1966. He led the league in strikeouts four times, setting a new single-season strikeout record of 382 in 1965. Koufax also set a record by pitching four no-hitters, including a perfect game in 1965. During Koufax's 12 years with the Dodgers, they made it to the World Series six times, and he was the World Series MVP in 1963 and 1965.

Diagnosed with arthritis in his left elbow, Koufax's final two seasons, 1965 and 1966, were marked by extreme pain and super-human pitching performances. Rather than risk permanent damage to his elbow and arm, Koufax retired after the 1966 season, just weeks away from his 31st birthday.

In her book *Sandy Koufax: A Lefty's Legacy*, author Jane Leavy examines Koufax's career, and his continued hold on the public's imagination. Koufax has a reputation for being a very private person, and although Leavy communicated with Koufax during her writing of the book, he never sat down for an interview with her.

Leavy deliberately didn't try to pry into Koufax's personal life, and thus she didn't interview his two ex-wives or any of his former girlfriends. This begs the question: is it right to write a biography of someone without interviewing, or trying to interview, such key figures in someone's life? It's up to the individual biographer, I suppose, but anyone looking for dirt on Sandy Koufax won't find it here. However, you shouldn't get the impression that Leavy didn't do her homework on this book, because she certainly did,

interviewing 469 people who are connected to Sanford Koufax in one way or another.

Because Leavy doesn't closely examine Koufax's private life, there isn't much material on his post-baseball life, so the book is essentially about Koufax's playing career. The book uses Koufax's 1965 perfect game against the Chicago Cubs as a framing device, and chapters alternate between a chronological look at Koufax's life, and the innings of his perfect game. Koufax's perfect game was pretty incredible. At that stage of his career, Koufax basically only had two pitches: a blazing fastball and a devastating, swooping curveball. The only problem was that Koufax also inadvertently tipped his pitches, giving the batters a clue as to what was coming. Even with that knowledge, the Cubs batters, including future Hall of Famers Ernie Banks, Billy Williams, and Ron Santo, were unable to reach base against him that night.

I learned a lot about Sandy Koufax from Leavy's biography, and one of the most interesting things is that he didn't play a lot of baseball in high school. His best sport was basketball, and Leavy tells the story of 17-year-old Koufax dunking when his high school team played the New York Knicks. For whatever reason, Koufax wasn't scouted by the NBA, and after pitching one season at the University of Cincinnati, Koufax was already being scouted by the Brooklyn Dodgers, his hometown team.

Koufax was signed by the Dodgers for a \$14,000 bonus, and because his signing bonus was over \$4,000, he had to spend two years in the major leagues before he could be sent to the minor leagues. The Dodgers never ended up sending Koufax down to the minor leagues, but Koufax only threw 100 1/3 innings for the Dodgers over those first two seasons. Sending Koufax to the minor leagues for more seasoning might have helped his overall development as a pitcher.

I was surprised when reading the book to learn how muscular Koufax was. Wayne "Doc" Anderson, the Dodgers' trainer in the 1960's said Koufax had "extreme muscles, the largest I ever worked on, including Ted Kluszewski and Frank Howard." (p.148) Maybe it was because so often Koufax was pictured next to his rotation mate Don Drysdale, who stood 6'5" that I never realized how tall and muscular Sandy Koufax was. But Koufax was listed at 6'2", and numerous people throughout the book testify to his very muscular physique.

One of the most famous things Sandy Koufax did in his career was to not start Game 1 of the 1965 World Series, because it fell on Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar. Koufax's longtime friend Tom Villante said, "When that happened, he transcended being a player and became a symbol." (p.171) Throughout the book, Leavy highlights the devotion of Koufax fans. People who have just the tiniest shred of a connection to him come up to her, wanting to share their stories.

From the beginning of his career, Koufax was thought to be different from the average baseball player. An article from March of 1955 carried the headline: "Koufax, Unorthodox, Reads Books." (p.176) Koufax's reluctance to seek out the maximum amount of publicity possible has garnered him the label of someone who is aloof. Red Adams, a scout and pitching coach for the Dodgers from 1959-1980, said of Koufax: "Sometimes people are misunderstood for being aloof when they're really just quiet." (p.248) I think this is a great point. Koufax's shyness or aloofness is probably overstated. A recluse would not have worked as a minor league pitching instructor for the Dodgers for ten years, as Koufax did. In some ways, we want to make people like Sandy Koufax more distant than they really are. He doesn't like publicity? Well, then, he must be an eccentric recluse. On the other hand, he might just be a regular guy who disdains the spotlight of self-promotion—but that's not as interesting a story.

There has always been something special about Sandy Koufax. I was born nearly a decade and a half after Koufax last pitched, but yet he's one of the figures from baseball's past that fills me with awe. There's a

grace and dignity that Sandy Koufax has had both throughout his baseball career and after his retirement. I remember the surge of emotion I felt when I saw Sandy Koufax in 2004, at the Hall of Fame induction ceremony in Cooperstown. I nearly teared up. Why? I can't really explain it, other than to say there's something special about Sandy Koufax. At one of my friend's bar mitzvahs, there was a drawing for a signed photo of Koufax, and I happened to win it. It's one of my favorite signed photos, even though I've never met Sandy Koufax. I've even had a dream about Sandy Koufax. It was sometime in the past year, and instead of a baseball player who hadn't pitched since 1966, Koufax was a novelist who hadn't written a book since 1966. Somehow I had tracked him down and found his office in the university where he taught. In my dream, Sandy Koufax looked just like he does today, and he was kind and smiled a lot. When I asked him where he had been since 1966, he laughed, spread his arms to indicate his office, and said, "I've been here the whole time!" Maybe that's the secret to the "real" Sandy Koufax—he's been right in front of us the whole time.

Philip says

In an effort to catch up with the multitudes of fascinating gaps in my reading, every year as Spring Training begins, I start a baseball book. This one by Jane Leavy, on one of my all-time favorite figures in baseball, has been sitting on my shelves for 5 years now and I took to it. What happened? The most frustrating of reading experiences.

I only give this book a reasonable rating based on the subject matter itself. In the venerable world of sports writing there are definitely the good and the bad, and without having read any of her other work how Koufax allowed Ms. Leavy to create this is beyond me. It's obvious her efforts were well intentioned and she was thorough and fair in her research and interviews with the many people surrounding the career of Sandy Koufax. All that effort makes the book quite well-rounded in perspective. Frankly it's the language, voice and structure that makes for almost intolerable reading. Furthermore, it's as she lifted the conventions of Ken Burns films and just applied them to the page in the way of setting up a chapter's era.

The result is horsey, unoriginal, and uninspired writing on a story that begs for better.

????Philip Swanstrom Shaw

Brina says

I enjoyed Jane Leavy's biography of Sandy Koufax primarily because a lot the story takes place away from the playing field. She examines all facets of his life as well as the the social histories surrounding it making it a compelling read.

I am surprised by the negative reviews and I am surmising that it is because the majority of people expected a baseball biography. I purposely read this book because it is not a ghost written sports autobiography. Leavy even cites this genre in the book as an example of how Koufax did not go seeking fame and money, even after his playing career had ended.

People I talk to who saw Koufax pitch remember the domination and then call him a recluse. Leavy refutes this common misconception. Koufax remains loyal to his friends and teammates but does not seek the limelight. He may be quiet but not a recluse. This image adds to the myth that was the pitcher Sandy Koufax. I am glad I picked up this book because beforehand I mainly knew the pitcher as the man who refused to

pitch on Yom Kippur. At least now I can say I have learned about other aspects of his life.

John Dugan says

As a baseball fan I have high expectations when it comes to engaging in text surrounding the game. This book just really didn't work for me. It took the story of a pitcher by the name of Sandy Koufax, who only had a twelve year career with the Dodgers, and really gave detailed descriptions of things that just weren't important to me as a reader. This was problematic in my opinion because as Sandy had such a short career in baseball, there was no way Leavy was going to have an entire story to tell over about 300 pages of writing, especially if he isn't even going to write about Sandy's childhood that much. I mean, come on! It's a biography, there should've been more information about the man's life rather than his charitable events that he does today and his little golf tournaments that he plays in. I know a lot of people who play golf that are retired and participate in charitable events, so I don't want to hear that kind of stuff when I'm reading a biography. Tell me about how he "got there" in "the spotlight" and about his success as a Jewish athlete in America, you know, instead of just rambling about his little injuries and post baseball life. I must say I enjoyed the chapters surrounding his perfect game against the Cubs, however, as Leavy did a good job bringing Sandy's historic game to life on the pages. Overall, not my favorite.
