



# **Dynastic, Bombastic, Fantastic: Reggie, Rollie, Catfish, and Charlie Finley's Swingin' A's**

*Jason Turbow*

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**How the Oakland A's of the 1970s—a revolutionary band of brawling Hall of Famers—won three straight championships and knocked baseball into the modern age**

The Oakland A's of the early 1970s were the most transformative team in baseball history. Never before had an entire organization so collectively traumatized baseball's establishment with its outlandish behavior and business decisions, let alone an indisputably winning record: five consecutive division titles and three straight championships. The drama that played out on the field was exceeded only by the drama in the clubhouse and front office. But those A's, with their garish uniforms and outlandish facial hair, redefined the game for coming generations.

Under the visionary leadership of owner Charles O. Finley, the team assembled such luminaries as Reggie Jackson, Catfish Hunter, Rollie Fingers, and Vida Blue. Finley acted as his own general manager, his insatiable need for control dictating everything from the playlist of the ballpark organist to the menu for the media lounge. So pervasive was his meddling that one of his managers, Dick Williams, quit in the middle of the championship celebration following Oakland's Game 7 victory over the Mets in the 1973 World Series. The advent of free agency spelled the end of Finley's reign; within two years, his dynasty was lost.

A sprawling, brawling history of one of baseball's unforgettable teams, *Dynastic, Bombastic, Fantastic* is a paean to a turbulent, magical time.

## **Dynastic, Bombastic, Fantastic: Reggie, Rollie, Catfish, and Charlie Finley's Swingin' A's Details**

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## **From Reader Review Dynastic, Bombastic, Fantastic: Reggie, Rollie, Catfish, and Charlie Finley's Swingin' A's for online ebook**

### **Mike says**

This book brings the stars of the A's of the early '70s to vivid life! While it's fabulous to read the many behind the scenes stories about Catfish, Vida, Blue Moon, Tenace, Rollie Fingers, Rudi, Campaneris, and the incomparable Reggie Jackson, the batshit crazy star of the this book is the Owner, Charlie O. Finley. Jason Turbow is a fabulous writer, and does a masterful job of balancing game accounts with anecdotal narratives. This book is terrific!

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### **Bret Dougherty says**

Entertaining read of a team that with all of the ownership meddling, bad trades, poor environment, locker room fiascoes, and injuries should have been relegated to losing. Despite all of the obstacles, this team was amazing, and this book captures the legacy of a team that is often forgotten.

The book moves at a pretty good pace. The author could have dug deeper to uncover the thoughts and paths of many of the characters, but the research is strong enough to carry the reader through the will to uncover the 'whys' behind each character's time in the A's journey. With that said, the inside stories surrounding A's manager, Dick Williams, set a very sharp background to support how this team grew to success and how they could stay on top for a long time. Williams emphasis on fundamentals and how his drive could wear thin are easily depicted.

The author also presents a very vivid picture of the enigmatic and even mercurial, Charles O'Finley. An enjoyable feature is that the author somehow displays an understanding of the successes of O'Finley. 'Charlie O' makes a lot of blunders, but he also stands a firm ground which is heeds respect. With that said, the reader can read between the lines that libations, pride, and ego were certainly major drags on his decision-making and miserly behavior. The reader will often find a lot of head-shaking when recounting some of his moves throughout the decade.

The author also provides a great answer as to how this team won with a lot of 'no-name' players and through the chaotic environment and the miserable, if not petty, acts of Charles O'Finley. Many of the players came up through the A's system at the same time, and they were able to have powerful concoction of group accountability and respect. Also, the A's had incredible leadership with many of the players on the team. A's players may have been perceived as renegades, but they demanded the best of themselves and the teammates surrounding them. The author does a great job in conveying how they demanded the respect of each other and themselves throughout the book.

It helps that I'm a big fan of the '70s A's. However, I'll say that this was a very enjoyable summer baseball read. Rock the white cleats. Go green and gold. By the end of the book, you'll see the Kelly Green and Gold combo in a different way. Damn, this team was good.

BD

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## **Kev Willoughby says**

If it is possible to pity a group of back-to-back-to-back World Series championship baseball players, this book will help you do it.

In the final years of baseball's pre-free agency era, a megalomaniac of a baseball owner constantly wields his power and suppresses the salaries of the best players on the best team of the early 1970s. This book is as much a biographical sketch of owner Charlie Finley's continuous struggles to maintain self-importance and gain respect among his peers and subordinates as it is a guide for how not to win friends and influence people. Reading accounts of what Finley's players and other employees had to endure in order to work or play professional baseball for him will leave you shaking your head over and over. It's hard to believe he was ever given an opportunity to own and maintain a business with employees over any length of time, let alone one of the greatest professional baseball teams ever.

The A's franchise has a rich and dynamic history dating back to the early 20th century influence of Connie Mack to the modern day "Moneyball" approach to managing the team. This book takes a look at a time in between, when the quality of baseball on the field was at its highest at the same time that the professionalism of the ownership and the off-the-field drama was at its lowest; a collection of the team's proudest and most shameful moments happening simultaneously.

They say that truth is stranger than fiction, and this book lives up to that standard. Turbow did a great job with his research and presentation. Even though you know going into it that the A's win every playoff series between 1972-1974, there's still suspense and wonder in the story. Very well-written and dramatic, this is a page-turner. It is certainly one of the best baseball books I've ever read.

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## **Steve says**

Great book for any 70's baseball fan. I know about Finley and his ways but this book added so much more to what I already knew, or thought I knew. The author interviewed many of the former players on those teams and their recollections and stories were, er, fantastic. A fun and easy read just in time for Spring Training!

The only negative (and I would have deducted a star if Goodreads allowed) is that he kept calling Charlie Finley; "The Owner", throughout the book. It got annoying and then I just glazed over it and got used to it after awhile. No idea why he didn't just say "Finley" except to think it was funny? But it was still a good enough book for me to give it the full five stars.

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## **Tom Gase says**

A very good book on the Oakland A's in the early 1970's. The book focuses on the years 1972-1974 when the A's won World Series. The Fall Classics, ALCS and seasons are all described in detail, but in a way that flows well. The years 1971 and 1975 are talked about a little as well, but the author, Jason Turbow decides to focus on the World Series' years and it turns out to be a good choice. You learn about all the turmoil here and how the team was very good, but often fought with each other. Most of all, they all hated Charlie Finley. IF

you are a fan of Charlie Finley, probably don't want to read this book. As well as a recount of all the big games you get a good inside look on just about every single player and manager of these teams, and of course Finley. Turbow describes in great detail stories on Reggie Jackson, Rollie Fingers, Sal Bando, Catfish Hunter, Vida Blue, Bert Campaneris, Ken Holtman, Gene Tenace, Joe Rudi, Blue Odom, Mike Andrews, Herb Washington, Dick Williams and Alvin Dark just to name a few. Kind of reminded me of the book "The Bad Guys Won" by Jeff Pearlman on the 1986 Mets, but only if the Mets won three years in a row instead of just one title. Fans of baseball MUST read this book. Oakland A's fans should read it more than once. Very good stuff and I can't wait to read more by this author.

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### **Raymond Miney says**

An engaging dive into the established baseball institutions and the iconoclastic Oakland A's of the early 1970s. An inside look into a changing game set against the backdrop of larger-than-life personalities.

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### **Rob Neyer says**

Comprehensive and entertaining, probably going to serve as the standard work on the most interesting team of the 1970s. If editing, I would have done my best to discourage the post facto analysis and pop psychology, but those things don't take up much space. I'd still like to read a good biography of Charlie Finley - I suspect one already exists - but I now feel otherwise educated about the Swingin' A's...

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### **Nick Paulenich says**

Jason Turbow does an excellent job of detailing the rise of the Oakland A's into a 1970s power and the team's fall from grace under owner Charles Finley.

Turbow does a nice job of investigating the personality conflicts (and there were many) as well as detailing the major events of the A's under Finley.

If you love baseball, especially 1970s baseball, I highly recommend this book. It is 400 pages but reads like a 200 page book. I never felt like the book dragged on or ended abruptly.

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### **Matt Ely says**

It's a book about baseball, but to a certain degree the baseball is incidental. This is an attempt to understand the mind of one Charles O. Finley and the way that his personality both created and ensured the self-destruction of a dynasty. There's something epic about the story of the seemingly self-made man who watches his empire slip away and dies unmourned and unloved.

And yet, there's something pretty banal about that too. Finley is the most prominent character, as the owner of the Oakland A's, but he is not the most interesting one. The issue is that Finley is incapable of surprise. His ends are always about greed and self-aggrandizement. He never compromises, even when it's in his own

best interest. He betrays anyone who trusts him. He is a figure of absolutes, and even extremism gets stale if it cannot evolve with time.

The book stands out because of how it highlights the many people who operated in the franchise and chose different ways of being. Like Alvin Dark, the manager brought in to be a patsy who ends up diffusing Finley's rage by being uncompromisingly kind, who tries to respect his players even when they don't respect him. Of course Dark is also an ignorant racial bigot, who makes generalizations about his players based on race because it's simply how he understands the world to be. Dark isn't a cartoon villain; he's a mixed up man who is sometimes hopelessly backward, sometimes boldly progressive.

The same goes for the players who alternate between championing the rights of unionized labor to chafing under the expectation to adjust to data-based analysis.

The book is about respect. What made and broke most of these relationships was being given dignity or someone trying to take it away (usually Finley himself). While I don't remember any of these teams, not having been born, I can really appreciate the degree to which the author relied on first person accounts from those who were there, giving this almost the feel of an oral history.

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### **Harold Kasselmann says**

This is one of the best baseball books I have ever read. It's about one of the most underappreciated teams in baseball history, and the owner whose management style somehow brought out the best in his players. History has recorded those 70's years as perhaps the most turbulent years any team has ever undergone. The A's were a team that was better than its individual parts. They argued, belittled one another, needled, and on occasions physically fought one another. There was no team leader, although Sal Bando had been a captain. In their own way, they were all team leaders keeping one another accountable for their play on the field. Charlie O. Finley built the team, and his narcissism created the glue that held those individual players together so that their common enemy was not always their opponents, but rather their own "Owner". For five years, despite poor pay, poor field conditions, poor travel accommodations, and a penny pinching pathologically controlling owner, those A's won three World Championships in a row and five division championships. But Finley's indifference and bald faced lies to the players as well as free agency led to a free fall in the standings that could only be cured with new ownership. Finley was innovative but his need for power and his ownership style of micromanaging everything about the team eventually alienated everyone. When he died only two of his former employees attended his funeral. Jason Turbow captures all of those years in this terrific book that confirms the stories you have heard about the battling A's. Finley so incensed his team that they twice threatened to boycott a world series game (Mike Andrews affair) and to strike (sale of Joe Rudi et.al.) during the season. The seasons are well illustrated and the nature of the players and owner are artfully depicted. This is a wonderful look back into time before Andy Messersmith and Dave McNally changed the game by winning their free agency; a time when an owner could manipulate, control, and paradoxically become a rallying cry for his players to achieve greatness.

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### **Movedoya says**

Jason Turbow is masterful in covering one of the most under reported eras of baseball. Despite very balanced analysis, owner Charlie O. Finley comes out the destructive egomaniac who could have maintained a 4 or 5

year World Series swing, but seemingly got bored with success and so petulantly demolished the masterpiece. He had the \$\$ to sign top players when free agency raised its head after the '74 series, and he could have sold the team more or less intact once he could not afford to support a winner. Greed, however was/is a two-way street. The players' attitude, once they knew of each other's salaries, went Richter. It was/is no longer an honor to play for a winner but an honor to have the higher salary, even if that means playing for a mediocre club or basement dweller.

If Finley thought he was a god, he was; he was Zeus zapping the peons who thrived on his powers but in the end getting hogtied by his own court, except for Charlie there was no hundred handed Briareus to unbind him. The hundred hands (the fans who rarely went to the Coliseum) just wanted to keep their boys on the East Bay instead of the East Coast and could not understand why ownership would not cough up. But glory being ignominiously dashed by Finley's self-deluded lightening is what makes the A's 72-74 run so magical, dreamlike actually.

Turbow noted many great plays, but the one that stands out most on print is the relay to throw out Buckner on third ('74 clinching game 5) after Billy North "Bucknered before Buckner Bucknered". It's got Reggie Jackson showing his defensive hustle and Dick Green conducting a frictionless relay. Green allows the backstopping right fielder's throw to pass right through him, as if melding into ether for the split second needed to reroute to third. If Finley was Zeus, Green--routinely setting up position where the ball almost always ended up (well before most of the sabermetric geeks of today were born)--was Zen.

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## **Brina says**

Baseball season has come to a close, and with over one hundred days until pitchers and catchers report for spring training, any baseball fan will admit to experiencing withdrawal symptoms. The last two world series champions have all the making of becoming modern dynasties, each with a full complement of young players who could man their positions for the next ten years or more. With these champions set to have an impact on the baseball landscape over the coming decade, the baseball book group selected as for November a choice about a dynasty in years past, *Dynastic, Bombastic, Fantastic: Reggie, Rollie, Catfish, and Charlie Finley's Swingin' A's* by Jason Turbow. In a step back to the early 1970s, Jason Turbow takes his readers to a time when a young, brash team of infighters ruled the baseball world.

Charles Oscar Finley was an accomplished Indiana farmer turned business and salesman. Using his won't take no for an answer attitude, he quickly rose in ranks in the sales community and decided to start his own insurance company. While his attitude earned him a small fortune, Finley did not have the one thing he desired- a baseball team. On two occasions he submitted bids to buy the Kansas City A's and on two occasions he was rejected by the baseball establishment, primarily because he would not relocate to Kansas City from Indiana despite promises to do so. Finally, in 1964 he got the opening he dreamed of when the owner of the A's suddenly passed away. With no other bidders available, baseball has no choice but to sell the team to Finley. Instantaneously, he made his impact felt around the baseball world by implementing promotions such as half price night, farmer days complete with goats, hens, and pigs, and introducing a mule named Charles O as the new team mascot. While these promotions did not translate into winning years or increased attendance, Finley had placed himself on the baseball map.

The year 1965 brought baseball its first high school draft, and Finley and his team of scouts selected the first of players who would play a prominent role in the championship years. Players such as Sal Bando, Catfish Hunter, and Rollie Fingers as well as superstar in the making Reggie Jackson and Gene Tenace all either started in the minors or Kansas City, developing their championship caliber. Then, in 1968 Finley moved the A's to Oakland, citing that attendance in Kansas City could not support a major league team. While other



owners did not like the idea of Finley moving his team on a whim, he strong armed enough of his colleagues to get what he wanted, and brought his team to the Bay Area. Attendance at the Oakland Coliseum never reached one million fans in a single year, but Finley had successfully moved his team to the location that he desired.

Turbow paints a picture of Finley as a ruthless, self-centered owner who did not care a lick for his players. He ran through managers like they were water and made Yankees' iron fisted owner George Steinbrenner look like a saint. Finally, in 1971, when the core of the dynastic team was intact, Finley selected Dick Williams to run the A's. Williams and Finley never saw eye to eye, and, by running his team in the manner that he desired, Williams immediately gained the respect of his players, who had been berated by Finley for years. Trading for pitcher Ken Holtzman following the 1971 season to augment a thin staff, the A's were finally starting to resemble a team that would have championship potential.

The team bonded due to a shared dislike of Finley. He undervalued his players and paid them well below the league average. This included players like Jackson who won the league MVP award and Hunter, the ace of the pitching staff who finished in the top five vote getters for the Cy Young award for five years in a row. Even though the players detested their owner, the diverse personalities on the team lead to infighting, injuries, and a swagger that made them go. Jackson, Bando, second baseman Dick Green, and Tenace all thought of themselves as team leaders. So did pitchers Vida Blue, Hunter, and Blue Moon Odom. The team bonded over bridge games, the Munich Olympic massacre, and whenever Finley mistreated a player. Fighting in the locker room happened at least twice a season, but it made the team go, and players admitting that they would not be the A's at their best if they did not fight and add fuel to their fire.

While the A's national league opponents in the world series thought of them as lucky, it was the Oakland team with three staff aces and a dominant closer in Fingers who walked away with three straight championships. Finley assumed that the team would stay intact for a decade, but after mistreating and undervaluing his stars, the top ten players were either traded or became free agents following the 1975 season. By 1977 the A's finished in last place and would not contend for the championship for another decade when they were under new ownership and had a new crop of star players. Yet, despite Finley's personality, the A's teams of the early 1970s played with such swagger and bravado that they managed to win multiple championships in spite of his shortcomings.

Whether the last two world series champions evolve into modern dynasties remains to be seen. Both appear to be made of championship mettle and should be fun to watch for the years to come. Perhaps one will be a throwback to the early 1970s A's teams that rivaled the Big Red Machine for title of best team of the decade. Jason Turbow's book was well researched and fun to read about a team full of internal strife at a time when the nation also experienced turmoil. With baseball withdrawal now in full swing, it was a welcome respite to read about the dynastic and bombastic Oakland A's.

4+ stars

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## Jay says

It seems like the early 70s A's would be a popular subject for a book. Lots of characters. Baseball names (Vida Blue, Blue Moon, Catfish). Streaks of wins. Confusing managers. Ugly owner issues. Beautiful, for their time, uniforms. But as the reader discovers in this book, there are an awful lot of unlikeables on this

team and in the owners box. The players argue, they fight. The caustic personalities come out (Vida). There are complaints about pay, not unwarranted. Some players learn to whine (Reggie). But really, what you are left with after reading is that owner Finley was quite a negative person. There were some good points to how he ran his team – he used to invest player salaries and pay out even if the investment went poorly. But this example was repeated quite a few times – it must have been hard to find good things to say about Finley. Following Finley’s relationships with his players even to his funeral, where only a couple attended, was quite telling, and a thought provoking way to end the story.

I found the book well written, and interesting, but there is a lot of negativity and bad vibes with this crew – this is more a learning opportunity than a feel good story. After reading this and “Steinbrenner” I don’t know if I can read another baseball owner book for a while. These have been too depressing.

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### **Asa McMahon says**

The bad guy, the antagonist, the villain. Choose a label and that’s Charles Finley in Jason Turbow’s excellent book entitled, *Dynastic, Bombastic, Fantastic*. “No man is indispensable here. Except maybe me,” blared the bombastic, self-absorbed owner of the dynastic 1970’s Oakland Athletics. Indispensable? Yeah right, Charlie O., we don’t believe you! Catfish Hunter, ace of the pitching staff even admitted “I tried not to think the worst of him, but it was impossible.” Let that sink in.

According to Turbow, Finley “equated power with importance and importance with love even in the absence of actual affection.” His players hated him. His coaches would rather quit than follow his ridiculous orders (Finley didn’t care; going through 14 managers in 17 years). What’s more, the media couldn’t find anything positive to rave about. They were quick to bury the Oakland Pathetics/Triple-A’s once they stopped winning. And the fans, they stayed home mostly uninterested, despite their team’s success. If they only knew the insanity that happened behind the scenes and in the locker room.

I loved the way this book was crafted. It is wonderfully written, backed with complete references, movie-like ‘where-they-are-now’ character profiles at the end and extremely juicy footnotes (my personal favorite) that go the extra mile. Who knew the A’s had a connection with Mrs. Field’s delicious cookies? And acting on a tip, did the Oakland Police Department really check the tall and neglected outfield grass for pot plants? This book is wild.

So was Finley all bad? Of course not; Finley was also fantastic in his own way. First, he was a survivor (tuberculosis) and then he became a goal-oriented, self-made businessman. He was relentless and driven; “the kind of guy who invented work when there wasn’t any to do”. He was fearless, a confident salesman and a motivator. He reminds me of important people in my own life. But most of all, he was an independent thinker and a visionary. Finley pushed for ideas like the designated hitter, divisional play, night World Series games and colorful uniforms before others even considered the possibilities. Finley’s motto was “sweat plus sacrifice equals success”. Think about where we could be if we adopted that motto. New Year’s Resolutions are just around the corner! Meanwhile, if you’re looking for a great baseball book this holiday season, I highly recommend Jason Turbow’s *Dynastic, Bombastic, Fantastic*!

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## Allen Adams says

<http://www.themaineedge.com/sports/dy...>

Spring is fast approaching, and with it comes the siren song of baseball.

Baseball has always been the American sport most conducive to literary exploration. Whether it's fiction or nonfiction, no sport makes for a better book than baseball.

Some teams – the Boston Red Sox, the New York Yankees – have had more than their share of ink spilled upon them over the years. But that narrow focus means that some truly fascinating narratives haven't really been told as thoroughly as perhaps they should have.

Thanks to a new book by author Jason Turbow, one particularly underappreciated team is receiving its due.

“Dynastic, Bombastic, Fantastic: Reggie, Rollie, Catfish, and Charlie Finley’s Swingin’ A’s” recounts the weird saga of the Oakland Athletics teams of the 1970s. Despite the fact that they had one of the most successful stretches in baseball history – three straight World Series titles in 1972, 1973 and 1974 – those A’s squads never really received the accolades their successes warranted.

Reggie Jackson, Rollie Fingers, Catfish Hunter – Hall of Famers all. And all of them came into their own as ballplayers in the garish green and gold of the Oakland A’s. Sal Bando, Gene Tenace, Bert Campaneris, Joe Rudi – phenomenal talents whose exceptional play made them key cogs on championship teams. Vida Blue, Blue Moon Odom, Ken Holtzman – volatile pitchers whose tempers off the mound matched their considerable talents on it.

These were the sprawling, brawling Oakland A’s of the 1970s. Perhaps no team in MLB history carried the sort of off-the-field dysfunction that this one did. Sniping in the press, locker room brawls – they were almost cartoonish in their inability to get along.

Yet even as they were at one another’s throats, one thing united them, the one thing that can almost always bring together even those of the greatest antipathy – a common foe. Even with their incredible stretch at the pinnacle of major league baseball, the Oakland A’s were a team that had just such a common foe - their owner, the eccentric Charles O. Finley.

Finley was despised by just about everyone in baseball. His fellow owners hated him. His players loathed him. He simply refused to play by any rules other than the ones he arbitrarily decided on for himself. And while his maverick nature didn’t earn him any friends, it also led – both directly and indirectly – to some of the biggest seismic shifts in the game’s long history.

From the massive rise of the decade’s early years to the cratering of its ending, “Dynastic, Bombastic, Fantastic” paints a picture of perhaps the most undercelebrated great team of the modern era. This was the team that – thanks to the almost comical combination of tight-fistedness and stubbornness of their owner – essentially opened the door for what would become free agency.

Major league baseball in the 1970s was something different, a violent collision of the establishment and the counterculture. The A’s existed in that nexus, packed with iconoclasts and led by a man who was against any type of authority that was not his own. This was the team that gave us the handlebar mustache of Rollie

Fingers and the nonsense aquatic nickname of the pitcher who was born Jim Hunter.

Turbow captures the deep weirdness of the era as it was refracted through the prism of baseball. He brings to life the antagonism that existed between players and recreates the utter disdain they (and everybody, really) had for Charles Finley. In truth, the A's had no right becoming a dynasty, but the stars aligned in a very specific way. The combination of talent and time led to the kind of success enjoyed by a scant few teams in MLB history, yet just as quickly, the A's plummeted into the second division and an irrelevant oblivion as Finley steered his rapidly sinking ship into iceberg after iceberg before finally abandoning it at the bottom of the American League sea.

“Dynastic, Bombastic, Fantastic” tells the story of a team that truly was all of those things. And while those spates of A's excellence might never be appreciated in the same way that other similar stretches are, thanks to Jason Turbow, fans of baseball history have the opportunity to dig deeper into one of the most bizarre – and fun – teams in the storied saga of the national pastime.

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