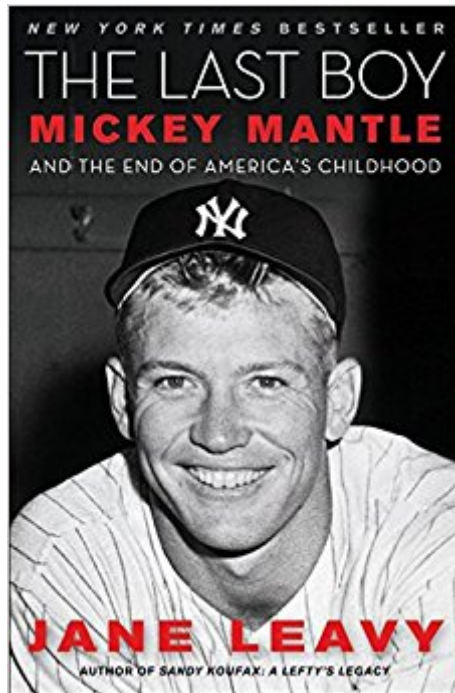




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# The Last Boy: Mickey Mantle And The End Of America's Childhood



## Synopsis

Award-winning sports writer Jane Leavy follows her New York Times runaway bestseller *Sandy Koufax* with the definitive biography of baseball icon Mickey Mantle. The legendary Hall-of-Fame outfielder was a national hero during his record-setting career with the New York Yankees, but public revelations of alcoholism, infidelity, and family strife badly tarnished the ballplayer's reputation in his latter years. In *The Last Boy*, Leavy plumbs the depths of the complex athlete, using copious first-hand research as well as her own memories, to show why The Mick remains the most beloved and misunderstood Yankee slugger of all time. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

**Product Description** Jane Leavy, the acclaimed author of the New York Times bestseller *Sandy Koufax: A Lefty's Legacy*, returns with a biography of an American original—number 7, Mickey Mantle. Drawing on more than 500 interviews with friends and family, teammates, and opponents, she delivers the definitive account of Mantle's life, mining the mythology of The Mick for the true story of a luminous and illustrious talent with an achingly damaged soul. Meticulously reported and elegantly written, *The Last Boy* is a baseball tapestry that weaves together episodes from the author's weekend with The Mick in Atlantic City, where she interviewed her hero in 1983, after he was banned from baseball, with reminiscences from friends and family of the boy from Commerce, Oklahoma, who would lead the Yankees to seven world championships, be voted the American League's Most Valuable Player three times, win the Triple Crown in 1956, and duel teammate

Roger Maris for Babe Ruth's home run crown in the summer of 1961—the same boy who would never grow up. As she did so memorably in her biography of Sandy Koufax, Jane Leavy transcends the hyperbole of hero worship to reveal the man behind the coast-to-coast smile, who grappled with a wrenching childhood, crippling injuries, and a genetic predisposition to alcoholism. In *The Last Boy* she chronicles her search to find out more about the person he was and, given what she discovers, to explain his mystifying hold on a generation of baseball fans, who were seduced by that lopsided, gap-toothed grin. It is an uncommon biography, with literary overtones: not only a portrait of an icon, but an investigation of memory itself. How long was the Tape Measure Home Run? Did Mantle swing the same way right-handed and left-handed? What really happened to his knee in the 1951 World Series? What happened to the red-haired, freckle-faced boy known back home as Mickey Charles? "I believe in memory, not memorabilia," Leavy writes in her preface. But in *The Last Boy*, she discovers that what we remember of our heroes—and even what they remember of themselves—is only where the story begins.

Q&A: Bill Madden Interviews Jane Leavy

For more than 30 years Bill Madden has covered the Yankees and Major League Baseball for the New York Daily News. The author of several books about the Yankees, including *Steinbrenner: The Last Lion of Baseball*, Madden is also the 2010 recipient of the Baseball Hall of Fame's J.G. Taylor Spink Award.

Madden: Your best-selling biography of Sandy Koufax was a tour de force, partly because Koufax was a very private man whose life story had never really been told before. Mickey Mantle's life is quite the opposite, it's been in the subject of a spate of different autobiographies, some of which he even wrote. Under those circumstances, what made you want to take up another book about him?

Leavy: Originally, I wanted to write about Willie, Mickey and The Duke in New York in the Fifties. The publisher said, "Do The Mick. Everybody loves The Mick." I was wary because so much had been written about him—he left a paper trail as long as the drive from Commerce, Oklahoma to the Bronx, so I didn't expect to learn that he'd been raised by a den of Alaskan she-wolves. My challenge was to strip away all the layers of myth that had accumulated and let Mickey breathe. And he, of all people, was my worst source. For example: the knee surgery he said he had after tripping over a drain in the 1951 World Series trying not to run into Joe DiMaggio in centerfield. In fact, he didn't have surgery until two years later. I only learned that because I went through every day of the New York Times from October 1951 to November 1953 looking for the date the knife fell! That's why this book took five years and nearly 600 interviews. I wanted to try to understand why after all these years, and all these revelations, Mickey Mantle still means so much to so many people—including me—and the first step was to get the basic facts straight.

Madden: You make the point early on in the book that

Mickey was a childhood hero, but you also have a recurring sequence in the book of your first interview with him in Atlantic City in 1983, whereâat one pointâhe drunkenly makes a pass at you. What lingering effect did this have on how you ultimately approached your book? Leavy: I was plenty nervous when I met him. Mickey was my hero. But, he was also a very particular kind of role model. I was born two months prematurely (in a hospital a mile from Yankee Stadium) and came with some of the flaws that afflict those who donât incubate as long as weâre supposed to. Mickey taught me how to function with pain and without complaintâhis triumphs were mine. I was devastated with how he acted. After Iâd taken his hand from my knee, I called the only person I could think of still awake at that hour, a new mother, who basically told me to grow up. The next morning, over breakfast, I vented my anger and disappointment, railing at him for, among other things, greeting my youthful autograph request with flatulence. He was stunned and remorseful, albeit in a hilariously idiosyncratic manner. He gave me an 8 x 10 glossy that said, âSorry, I farted, your friend, Mick.â For a moment, I felt I saw behind his crude facade. I decided the only way I could write this book was to acknowledge my lack of dispassion and scrutinize him completely. Thatâs what happened that weekend in Atlantic City. It forced me to see the world as it was, not how I wanted it to be. Madden: One of the people I wish Iâd been able to interview for my Steinbrenner book was Mantle, if only because I detected a very strained relationship between the two of them. Steinbrenner made a point to deify DiMaggio and had memorial services for Joe, Billy Martin, Roger Maris and Mel Allen, but did nothing for Mickey when he died. In your conversations with Mickey did he ever talk about Steinbrenner and anything that might have led to ill feelings toward each other? Leavy: When I told Mantle Iâd heard the Boss was thinking of turning Monument Park in centerfield into a water park for the disadvantaged youth of the South Bronx, Mantle was completely incredulous. He told me, âIt was 480 in centerfield when I played. Itâs 420 now and heâs talking about bringing them in farther,â and shook his head. âI was at a banquet one time and I said to him, âthey ought to let those boys throw the ball up and hit it.â That pissed him off.â Mantle was interested in Yankee historyâhe grilled a friend who saw Babe Ruth lying in state in the rotunda at the Stadium about what it was like to be there that day. But I donât think he had a whole lot of patience with âYankeeography.â It was a quick disillusionment. When he signed with the Yankees, reporters asked which Yankee had been his childhood hero. He said, âStan Musial.â George Weiss, the general manager, immediately âcorrectedâ his memory and from then on Joe D. was his hero. Furthermore, I think he was deeply disappointed with the baseball communityâs responseâor lack of responseâwhen commissioner Bowie Kuhn banned him in 1983 because of his affiliation with the Claridge Hotel and

Casino, a job he had taken to pay for his son Billy's treatment for non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma. He told me, "I feel really kind of bad no one took up for me." By the way, I was pretty sure he meant Steinbrenner. The Yankees did little more than observe a moment of silence when Mantle died. Madden: It would seem that most everybody pertinent to the book cooperated with you, especially the Mantle family. I was grateful for the cooperation I had from George Steinbrenner's friends and associates when I wrote Steinbrenner, but I had an advantage that you didn't in that most of them knew me personally and, I suppose, trusted me. As a stranger, did you meet any significant resistance? Leavy: Danny and David Mantle "Mickey's sons" and their late mother, Merlyn "were extremely generous with their recollections and insights. Their openness about their lives and their relationship with their father was extraordinary. Like him, they are extremely honest. There's no put on, as folks in Commerce, Oklahoma like to say. I hope they'll come away from the book with a deeper understanding of the forces that formed him and contributed to his downfall, but I don't know how they'll react. Madden: This is the definitive "warts and all" biography of Mickey, with heavy emphasis on all of his demons. How do you think Mickey himself would feel about the book? Leavy: I think it's an honest book and Mantle was a very honest man. I don't see this as a dark book. I hope it's enlightening in the most literal sense of the word and I hope that critics and readers at large will agree. I think the tragedy of Mantle is that he had so little time, at the beginning of his baseball career, and at the beginning of his sober life, to be his best self. He was a decent man who was genetically pre-disposed to alcoholism and enabled his whole life by the trappings of his celebrity. That's his story. As Billy Crystal told me about his movie, *61\**, Mickey wouldn't have wanted the sugar coat. His late wife, Merlyn, wrote about the sexual abuse he suffered as a young boy in the family memoir, *A Hero All His Life* and she elaborated on it when we spoke, as did several of his close friends. It turned out that his half sister wasn't his only abuser and experts tell me that many of the destructive behaviors he manifested are seen in victims of childhood sexual abuse. So, I came away with enormous compassion for him and, I hope, with an answer to the question posed by one of his minor league teammates: "Mickey, what happened?"

Starred Review. Bob Costas eulogized the Yankee great as "a fragile hero to whom we had an emotional attachment so strong and lasting that it defied logic." The "we" in Costas's remarks--with author Leavy (*Koufax: A Lefty's Legacy*) as stand-in--is as much the subject of this fascinating biography as the ballplayer himself. Mantle, who succumbed to cancer in 1995 at age 63, was justly famous for his baseball exploits, but what Costas described as Mantle's "paradoxical grip" on a

certain generation of baseball fans is exactly what Leavy tackles in this book. She should know. She spent much time in her childhood in the shadow of Yankee Stadium, a tomboyish "Mickey guy" listening to the roar of the crowd from across the Grand Concourse. While a sportswriter for the Washington Post, she won a 1983 assignment to interview Mantle for his upcoming golf tournament in Atlantic City. What happened that day and night between the fading, embittered Mantle and the former fan girl trying to do her job is the drama that structures Leavy's narrative--she has never reported the truth till now, and she does so without judgment. Instead, she proceeds with steely determination to understand what brought this onetime golden boy from the zinc mines of Oklahoma to center stage at Yankee Stadium and made him into America's quintessential tragic hero, a freakily gifted athlete haunted by a deadly genetic inheritance, including alcoholism. With storytelling bravado and fresh research, Leavy weaves around her own story the milestone dates in "the Mick's" career, which as often burnishes the legend as tarnishes it. Leavy concludes that Mantle cavorted in a more innocent time, when people believed in sports heroes and would not hear otherwise. That's hardly a new idea, but no matter: by the end of this book, readers will know what made Mantle rise, fall, and survive into recovery for his last 18 months. In Leavy's hands, the life of Mantle no longer defies logic: it seems inevitable. She's hit a long home run. 8 pages of color and 8 pages of b&w photos. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Leavy is a former sportswriter who has love and understanding of baseball that comes through as she writes about Micky Mantle. She describes him as tragic hero - so gifted, so flawed, so damaged, so beautiful. His traumatic knee injury occurred just seven months into his major league career. His death from alcohol-related cancer only 18 months after hard-earned sobriety. He did not have much time to be at his very best. Her writing is beautiful, the story (even though we all know how it ends) is captivating. I enjoyed it. The book includes 22 photos and 8 magazine covers. Ali Julia review

The Last Boy: Mickey Mantle and the End of America's Childhood has received some flack from devoted Yankee and Mantle fans. Granted, Jane Leavy uncovers the dark side of Mantle's life but she does it fairly. A huge Mantle fan, it pained her to discover and then write about the negative side of such a great talent and personality. I was one of those who got turned off by the star's alcohol fed boorishness in his later years but one who was delighted with his eventual sobriety and his realization of the harm his actions caused others. Like Leavy, I bemoan what could have been with this incredible talent but also celebrate the wonders he did produce.

Ms Leavy's book cast a whole new light on one of America's past and revered baseball heroes. And to be sure it sure is not favorable. Overall, the author tells an interesting story in a very mindful, pragmatic, and compelling way and, moreover, in a way that demonstrates that she does not have an ax to grind, an agenda to fulfill, or is it done in spite. Just the opposite, she held Mantle in high regards. As humans, we all have faults, however, as Ms. Leavy adequately points out and documents in her book Mantle had more than his share of them. The booze, women, infidelities, and juvenile behavior by Mantle makes him just another overpaid jock who could not handle the stress or pressures that most people constantly face in their lives. This is pointed out through the entire book. Ironically, what Leavy documents and writes about in her book, Jim Bouton discussed in his book "Ball Four" years ago and, interesting to note, was admonished for it. In fact, after Bouton's book everyone cried: "Not Mickey Mantle." As a baby boomer that grew up as a boy and teenager in the fifties and sixties, the name "Mickey Mantle" was revered. However, Ms. Leavy book informs us, the reader, that the public Mantle was not the same as the private Mantle. In particular, Ms. Leavy provides the reader of her book an in-depth analysis and story explaining how the two Mantles were very, very different. The author also provides the reader a credible story, with supporting documentation, including quotes, that describes how Mantle was a terrible and abusive father and husband (emotionally wise), less than a team player at various times, and a person who let many, many people down, including his very close friends and family on multiple occasions. The book shows mantle as a person who did not care to move beyond a youth of 18 year old regardless of his age I would strongly recommend this book. However, I warn anyone going to read this book that perhaps a longstanding myth about an American hero will come crashing down and their positive memories about Mickey Mantle might become negative. The only complaint I have about this book, in particular, Ms. Leavy's writing style, is the fact that she sometimes writes in a manner that mirrors the writing from a hard to understand and complex instruction manual, that is, long, and windy wording and prose. In the end analysis, however, the author provides an interesting story about a very complex person and his troubling, difficult, and problematic life.

One of the better sports books on a professional athlete. Well rounded and not a puff piece at all. This book will make you respect the abilities of Mickey Mantel, while at the same time dislike some of his personal attributes. The book also makes one wonder what could have happened if Mantle had taken better care of himself physically.

I've read Jane Leavy's bio of Sandy Koufax and thought it was one of the best baseball bios I'd read for quite awhile. I was expecting similar great things from her bio of Mickey Mantle but I was greatly disappointed. One key problem: She chose a number of significant events from Mantle's life and highlighted those. This meant that she jumped around often and sometimes repeated herself. Very confusing. Another, lesser, problem, for me at least. She focused way too much on his personal life (all the womanizing, drinking, and even the abuse he faced) and far too little on his baseball career. The author writes really well and her stuff is interesting. I also appreciated how she tried to prove (or disprove) certain stories/events from his life. These seemed to crop up as to illnesses but sometimes other things, too. If she writes another baseball bio, no doubt I'll read it. However, I certainly do hope it's better than this one.

This is a brilliant book by a top-notch writer and journalist. Who knew that Mickey Mantle was such a damaged human being? Leavy breaks new ground here when you thought everything was said and done about Mickey Mantle. Yet, in the end, she (and the reader) find it hard to stay mad at him and the feeling is pity and compassion for this golden boy who led a remarkably tortured life. You feel compassion, also, for Mantle's wife and children, who were taken along on a very bumpy ride. They deserved better. As a woman born in 1954, I certainly remember Mantle but never idolized him like the men did. Here, too, Leavy provides a valuable perspective, analyzing that unquestioning devotion Mantle inspired in so many male baseball/Yankee fans.

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