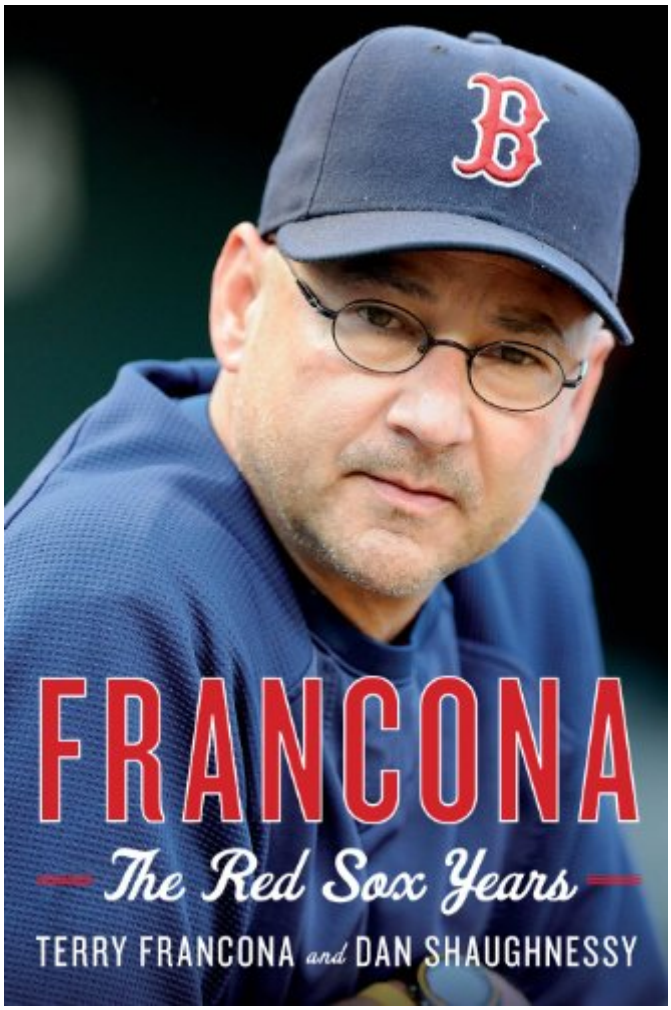
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Francona: The Red Sox Years



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Synopsis

From 2004 to 2011, Terry Francona managed the Boston Red Sox, perhaps the most scrutinized team in all of sports. During that time, every home game was a sellout. Every play, call, word, gestureÃ¢â ¬â •on the field and offÃ¢â ¬â •was analyzed by thousands. And every decision was either genius, or disastrous. In those eight years, the Red Sox were transformed from a cursed franchise to one of the most successful and profitable in baseball historyÃ¢â ¬â •only to fall back to last place as soon as Francona was gone. Now, in Francona: The Red Sox Years, the decorated manager opens up for the first time about his tenure in Boston, unspooling the narrative of how this world-class organization reached such incredible highs and dipped to equally incredible lows. But through it all, there was always baseball, that beautiful game of which Francona never lost sight. As no book has ever quite done before, Francona escorts readers into the rarefied world of a twenty-first-century clubhouse, revealing the mercurial dynamic of the national pastime from the inside out. From his unique vantage point, Francona chronicles an epic era, from 2004, his first year as the Sox skipper, when they won their first championship in 86 years, through another win in 2007, to the controversial September collapse just four years later. He recounts the tightrope walk of managing unpredictable personalities such as Pedro Martinez and Manny Ramirez and working with Theo Epstein, the general managing phenom, and his statistics-driven executives. It was a job that meant balancing their voluminous data with the emotions of a 25-man roster. It was a job that also meant trying to meet the expectations of three owners with often wildly differing opinions. Along the way, readers are treated to never-before-told stories about their favorite players, moments, losses, and wins. Ultimately, when for the Red Sox it became less about winning and more about making money, Francona contends they lost their way. But it was an unforgettable, endlessly entertaining, and instructive time in baseball history, one that is documented and celebrated in Francona, a book that examines like no other the art of managing in todayÃ¢â ¬â„¢s game.

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Customer Reviews

So I recently read FRANCONA The Red Sox Years by Terry "Tito" Francona and Dan Shaughnessy. First, let me say that I don't read many books so take this with a grain of salt: It wasn't what I expected and I was mildly disappointed. I'm blaming Shaughnessy.Now, I love Terry Francona and I don't mean any disrespect. He's an outstanding MLB manager who brought 2 World Series championships to us Red Sox fans in his first 4 years with the team--he was with the club for 8. He's engaging, funny, and has a great story to tell. I just think this could have been much, much more than it is.Despite the subtitle, the first six chapter of the book have basically nothing to do with the Red Sox. That's okay--they deal with Terry's childhood during his father's MLB career, Terry's own journey through high school, college, the minors, MLB, and into his coaching and managerial experience leading right up to, of course, how he was hired on as the Red Sox skipper. Mostly fairly interesting but then just call the book FRANCONA without the subtitle because from that point on there essentially was just one chapter per year for each year of his 8-year term at the helm and then a couple chapters post-Boston.Perhaps I'm splitting hairs but as I said initially, it was not what I expected. Much of the book has nothing to do with the Red Sox--it is Terry's life story. I was expecting extensive and previously unheard behind the scenes anecdotes regarding key players throughout the years. There is a bit of that but mostly we're getting Terry's take on incidents we already heard about. In the lengthy back story there's more about Michael Jordan's foray into minor league baseball (Terry managed him) than there was about key Red Sox players, some of whom get barely a mention with just a sentence or two. Even Red Sox traveling secretary Jack McCormick gets more ink than most of the players. Calvin Hill, the father of NBA star Grant Hill gets a big write up just for being in the front office of the Orioles at one point--something about hiring Theo down in

Baltimore.There are a few tidbits we have forgotten, or perhaps never knew such as Terry's last major league at bat was in Fenway Park and he flew out to Ellis Burks who he later managed in 2004. Terry was a coach with the 2003 A's and after Game 4 in Boston Jack McCormick used his contacts with the Boston PD to delay the A's at the airport so the Sox could get back to Oakland before them for Game 5--the Johnny Damon concussion game. Within weeks Terry was interviewing for the Red Sox skippership. I always thought a guy went in for an interview or two or three and then got the job or not. They had Terry basically hanging out at Fenway for most of the winter playing simulated baseball games with guys from Baseball Ops while he was still employed by the A's. For his entire term with the Sox the team had this computer (program) which they created and named Carmine which they used to help manage the team.There were a couple of poignant moments with Terry sharing how he broke down in tears--not because of game play but following high-stress situations which had weighed heavily on him for some time and had finally come to a positive resolution.Here's an excerpt (sorry--not related to him crying) regarding Pedroia when he won the 2008 MVP Award: "It was unbelievable...Tim Lincecum was the Cy Young winner and he had the whole Giants front office there from San Francisco...I was there with just Pam Ganley...Brian Cashman--the GM of the Yankees!--had to give me my MVP Award!...Our owners gave David a car or truck for doing I'm not sure what, and I've got nobody there when I get the MVP. All I got was a handshake."Francona decided the best response was a gag gift for his second baseman...Pedroia found an electrically charged blue mini-scooter in front of his locker...a pink "AL MVP" helmet hung from the handlebar with a phony note from Lucchino..."Sorry we couldn't make it to the MVP presentation...Congratulations, Dustin."See, the book should have been full of anecdotes like that but sadly it wasn't.Sure, there were many interesting tidbits like dissecting the ill-fated trip to Japan in 2008, what went on in various meetings and on team flights and how toxic the clubhouse was at times. Also interesting is how intertwined the histories of so many players and coaches are, "I knew Nomar already from when I coached him in the Arizona Fall League," etc.And I never knew his health was this bad: "The most recent knee replacement followed the 2006 knee replacement, knee scopes, knee reconstructions, cervical disk surgery, and numerous wrist, elbow, and shoulder surgeries. He'd cheated death during the Christmas season of 2002, surviving a pulmonary embolism on each side of his lungs, as well as subsequent blood clots, staph infections, massive internal bleeding, and the near-amputation of his right leg. He had a small metal device implanted into his vena cava vein to prevent clotting. He was unable to jog and would be on blood-thinning medication for the rest of his life. He wore sleeves on both his legs, and still got cold easily. Anytime he sat too long his legs swelled and needed to be elevated....Blood-level

maintenance and pain management would be part of his life for as long as he lived."Anyway, here’s a few of my takeaways: The ownership group of Henry, Werner, and Lucchino is a despicable and dysfunctional bunch of weasels. Theo Epstein is a supremely talented and likable GM. Manny is a lowlife dirt bag.Overall, a worthy read for a Red Sox fan but nothing more. If not a Red Sox fan, you probably won’t care a lick."When people ask me if I left the Red Sox on my own or if I was fired, I don’t even know how to answer that. I really don’t." --Terry "Tito" Francona

Although I am a voracious consumer of non-fiction I seldom traverse into the world of sports. If I read 50 books a year chances are less than a handful would be concerned with sports. There are simply too many other subjects I would prefer to read about. Several weeks ago The Boston Globe began releasing excerpts from Dan Shaugnessy and Terry Francona’s long awaited and highly touted new collaboration "Francona: The Red Sox Years". Given all of the scuttlebutt on Boston sports radio I was led to believe that "Francona" would be awash in new and surprising revelations about Terry Francona’s eight year tenure as manager of the Boston Red Sox. Being a lifelong Sox fan I could not resist the temptation. I ordered the book immediately.Much to my surprise I found very little in the way of new information in "Francona". Practically everything I read in this book I had seen in print or heard discussed on sports radio and TV at one time or another. I must admit that I was a bit disappointed. This is by no means a bad book. Shaugnessy and Francona do a workmanlike job of chronicling Tito’s eight year run as manager of the Red Sox. It was fun to read again about the antics of the so-called "idiots" on that ’04 championship team and about "Manny being Manny". How Terry Francona survived seven seasons of dealing with that guy is beyond me. And you will probably shed a tear when Tito recalls hugging John Lester after he tossed his no-hitter back in 2008. It was such an emotional moment for both men. I was also very happy to see the recollections shared by former Sox GM Theo Epstein woven into the text. "Francona" spells out how it all started to unravel in 2010. Perhaps the key moment was when CEO Tom Werner suggested that "We need to start winning in a more exciting fashion". One had to wonder what the real priorities of the organization were. It seemed to be all downhill from there.As I indicated earlier there is no denying that "Francona: The Red Sox Years" is an important addition to the historical record and will be enjoyed by generations of Red Sox fans to come. Dan Shaughnessy is an fine writer and Terry Francona certainly had a fascinating tale to tell. Tito saw it all during his eight years in Boston. Yet having said that, I cannot help but come away from this book feeling a little bit cheated. I simply did not learn as much as I expected to. According to the ratings system if a reviewer feels that a book is merely "OK" then he/she should rate it three stars. At the end of the day that is where I

come down on this one. For me, "Francona: The Red Sox Years" simply did not live up to my expectations. As such, I am only able to offer a somewhat lukewarm recommendation.

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