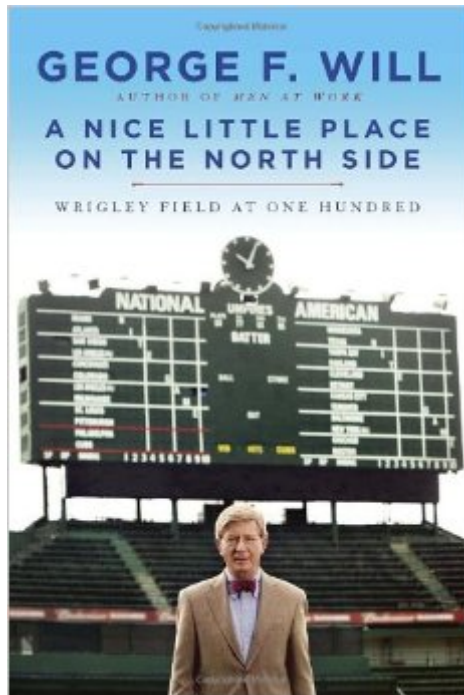


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# A Nice Little Place On The North Side: Wrigley Field At One Hundred



## Synopsis

“George Will on baseball. Perfect.” —Los Angeles Times

In *A Nice Little Place on the North Side*, leading columnist George Will returns to baseball with a deeply personal look at his hapless Chicago Cubs and their often beatified home, Wrigley Field, as it turns one hundred years old. Baseball, Will argues, is full of metaphors for life, religion, and happiness, and Wrigley is considered one of its sacred spaces. But what is its true, hyperbole-free history? Winding beautifully like Wrigley’s iconic ivy, Will’s meditation on “The Friendly Confines” examines both the unforgettable stories that forged the field’s legend and the larger-than-life characters “from Wrigley and Ruth to Veeck, Durocher, and Banks” who brought it glory, heartbreak, and scandal. Drawing upon his trademark knowledge and inimitable sense of humor, Will also explores his childhood connections to the team, the Cubs’ future, and what keeps long-suffering fans rooting for the home team after so many years of futility. In the end, *A Nice Little Place on the North Side* is more than just the history of a ballpark. It is the story of Chicago, of baseball, and of America itself.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“In baseball, the difference between excellence and mediocrity is usually not the blockbuster signing of this or that free agent. Rather, it is the cumulative effect of management’s attention to scouting, player development, and so on—which requires time, effort and, always, money. Because Cubs fans fill so many seats no matter what is happening on the field, there is a reduced incentive to pay the expense of organizational excellence.” — page 136

And that, according to author George Will appears to be the gist of the problem. For baseball fans in the

Windy City and for people all across the fruited plain Wrigley Field has become something akin to a shrine. There is a certain mystique about the place that attracts both avid fans and curious tourists, some of whom have little interest in what was once the national pastime. As Wrigley Field turns 100 in 2014 George Will thought it might be an appropriate time to recall its fascinating and sometimes bizarre history. He has scribbled his thoughts into a neat little book he calls *A Nice Little Place on the North Side: Wrigley Field at One Hundred*. This is a book destined to be great summer reading for sports fans, history buffs and general readers alike. Will conjures up a ton of fun facts, interesting tidbits and unforgettable yarns. As a lifetime baseball junkie I must tell you that I had a difficult time putting this one down. Having been an ardent Cubs fan since 1948 George Will has pretty much seen it all "everything that is except his beloved Cubs playing in a World Series. In *A Nice Little Place on the North Side* Will recalls many of the memorable events and incidents from the sixty plus years he has been following the team. Sometimes the ineptitude is nothing short of stunning "like the time a Cubs player tried to steal third base with the bases loaded! When asked about it after the game the player sheepishly responded "I had such a good jump on the pitcher. You just can't make this stuff up folks. Then there was the College of Coaches that was dreamed up by owner Phil Wrigley in the early 1960s. Instead of a manager Wrigley decided that 4 head coaches would rotate throughout the season. You can imagine how that one worked out. I am a lifelong baseball fan and I had never heard of that one! And who will ever forget the notorious Steve Bartman incident during the 2003 National League Championship Series? That poor guy was lucky to get out of that place with his life! Throughout the pages of *A Nice Little Place on the North Side* George Will also manages to offer up a capsule history of the Cubs franchise. You will discover that Wrigley Field was originally called Weeghman Park and that the Cubs were the first team to give away the rights to broadcast major league baseball games. It was a rousing success! You will also learn the story behind the story of the ivy that has adorned the outfield walls since 1937. Finally, you will meet some of the folks who have made their mark at the fabled ballpark over the years. Hack Wilson knocked in 708 runs in 738 games between 1926 and 1930 and would go on to be enshrined in the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, NY. Hall of Famer Ernie Banks had a remarkable six year run in the late 1950s when he hit 248 HR as a shortstop in a pathetically weak Cubs lineup. Banks has the distinction of playing in the most big league games (2528) without ever appearing in the World Series. Other memorable characters at Wrigley include Pat Pieper who served as the Cubs PA announcer from 1916 until his death in 1974 at the age of 88. And did you know that one Jacob Rubenstein (a/k/a Jack Ruby) was a vendor at Wrigley when he was a teenager? Interesting

stuff! I admire writers with great vocabularies and George Will can turn a phrase with the best of them. I found *A Nice Little Place on the North Side: Wrigley Field at One Hundred* to be an exceptionally well-written and endlessly entertaining book. Will quotes liberally from Roberts Ehrsgott's superb 2013 history of the Cubs *Mr. Wrigley's Ball Club: Chicago and the Cubs During the Jazz Age* which I would recommend to you as well. So is Wrigley Field to blame for the Cubs incomprehensible lack of success? It is certainly an interesting theory. I suggest you read the book and draw your own conclusions. Highly recommended!

What we have here is a light little read about Wrigley Field. Well, sort of; it's really not too well focused. It has many diversions, some of them pleasant and some of them tedious, into such wide-ranging fields as history, economics, psychology, neuroscience, architecture, sociology, and urban planning. (The section on the surprising importance of beer to the formation of the first civilizations comes fairly close to being worth the price of admission in and of itself.) The problem is, the book is very scattered. It's anecdotal; in addition to the above mentioned digressions, it offers stories by the dozen of memorable Wrigley games, memorable Cubs, memorable opponents, etc etc. I managed to shake a handful of baseball trivia questions loose (Who was the only Major League player who was a contemporary of both Babe Ruth and Hank Aaron? True or false: Major League teams have never combined for fifty runs in a single game.) Still, while 190 pages of potpourri is not an unpleasant way to while away a few hours, I had expected more from Will. There's something of a thesis to the book, one mentioned now and again in desultory fashion. It has to do with the idea that Wrigley Field's unique position as a stadium where the goal of making game day a pleasant experience regardless of the score has led to decade upon decade of leadership with no incentive to improving the team, thus leading to the poor Cubbies' never-ending futility. It's an interesting point, but it's lost in the general structure of a meandering yarn. An okay baseball book.

I regularly read George Will's columns and watch him on the Sunday morning news shows. I've always trusted that his writing would be free of misspellings and typos and I usually learn a new word or two as a bonus. Seeing that he had a book on Wrigley Field coming out this year, I preordered it. As other reviewers have noted, the book is rather thin and it skips around without any apparent rhyme or reason. However, it is pleasant enough and I did pick up a few facts I had not known. My reason for two stars is the numerous inaccuracies that any real Cub fan would recognize. Ernie Banks did not hit 500 home runs while playing shortstop. Harry Caray did not sing

the seventh-inning stretch "thousands" of times at Wrigley Field. The Cubs dugout is not on the first-base side at Wrigley. The Cubs were not 36 games under .500 during the first three years of Ricketts family ownership. There are a few others, but c'mon, this is pretty basic stuff here.

I'm not really a fan of baseball in general and the Cubs in particular. With two younger brothers and my dad, I was exposed to WAAAYYYY too much baseball as a child. Cubs, White Sox and Yankees. It was enough to drive a girl crazy. As an adult, I have figured out that life already supplies enough disappointment without having to cheer for the Cubs too (It's bad enough that I am a Bears fan). That being said, I LOVED this book. It's a love letter to and about a mythical baseball field and an inept team from a lifelong fan. It's a great history on the Cubs and the field as well. It's written very tongue in cheek in the wry style that is unique to George Will and I giggled out loud throughout the book. Yes, Will makes fun of the Cub's ineptitude (how can you NOT?) but it's clear he is a devoted (deranged?) Cub fan who loves his team and their field. HIGHLY recommend for baseball lovers in general and you Cub fans in particular.

George Will has turned me into a Wrigley Field fan! Being a transplant to IL, I had heard of it, but only in passing. I enjoy History, and have enjoyed George Will over the years, so ordered his book. He did not disappoint! It is filled with History of the Field, the City, and the Cubs. I now have an appreciation for his Little Place on the North Side and I earnestly root for the Cubs.

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