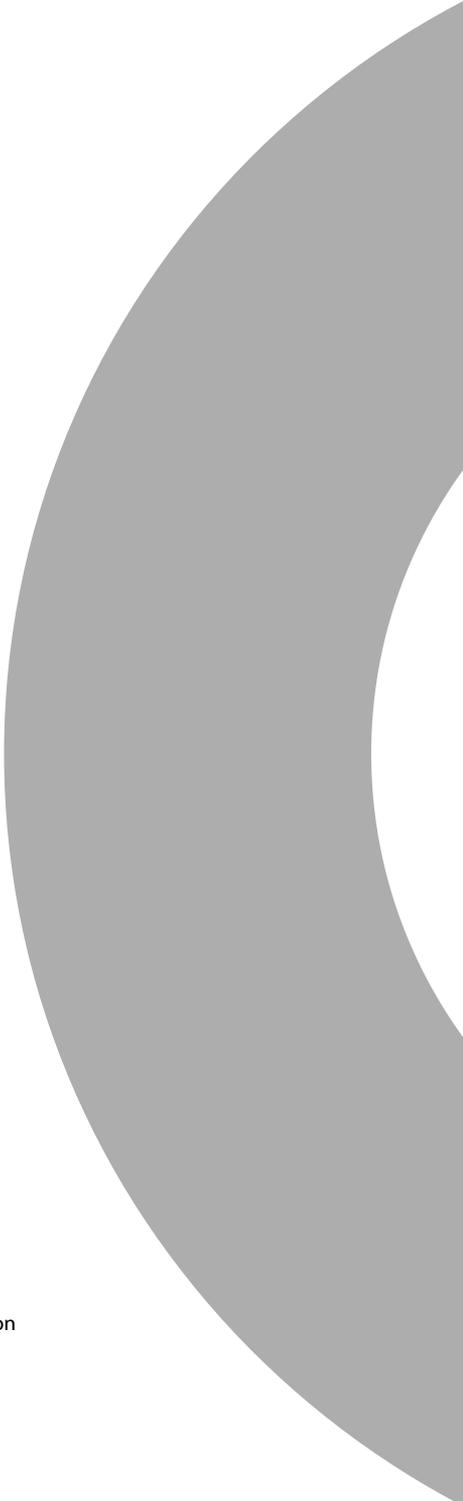


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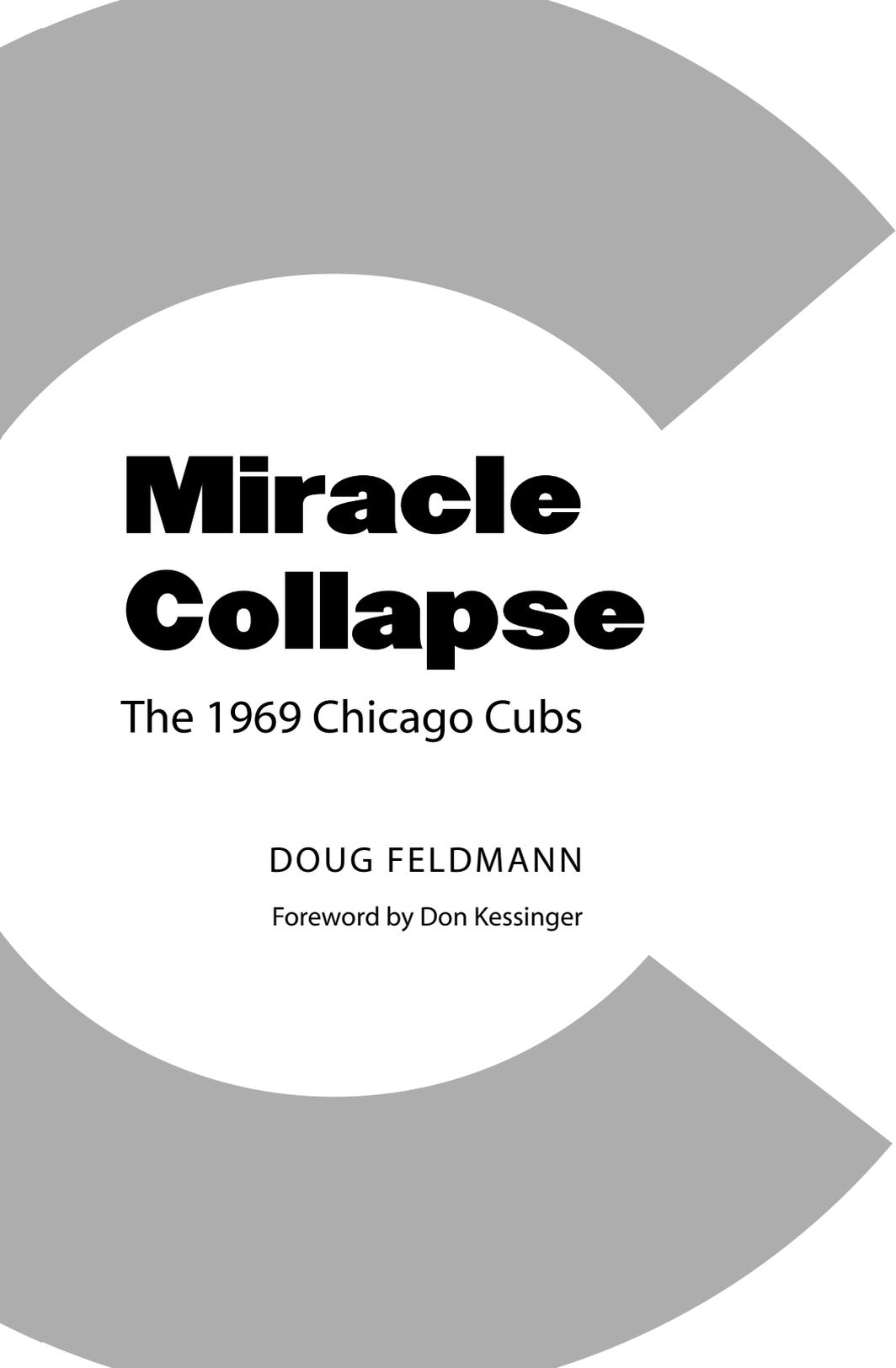
The 1969 Chicago Cubs

DOUG FELDMANN Foreword by Don Kessinger

Miracle Collapse



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*To my family and friends,
who have given me more
than I deserve.*

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Team photo of the 1969 Chicago Cubs

Don Kessinger, Cubs shortstop

Second baseman Glenn Beckert

Ernie Banks

Pitcher Ken Holtzman

Left fielder Billy Williams

Pitcher Ferguson Jenkins against the Mets

Ron Santo

Pitcher Bill Hands

“Head Shot Card” of the 1969 Cubs

FOREWORD

In July 1993 I was coaching baseball at my alma mater the University of Mississippi. While on a recruiting trip to the Chicago area, I was sitting alone down the first base line watching some prospective student-athletes play baseball. A very nice lady came up to me and asked, "Are you Don Kessinger?" When I answered in the affirmative, she said, "Happy Birthday." I was amazed that she would know it was indeed my birthday, and I asked her how she knew. Her simple reply was, "I am a Cub fan." It had been eighteen years since my last game with the Cubs, in 1975, but such is the nature of baseball's greatest fans.

Doug Feldmann has written a book on perhaps Chicago's most beloved team, the 1969 Cubs. Even though we did not win the pennant that year, losing to the dreaded New York Mets, it was an unbelievable summer in Chicago. Chapter after chapter and page after page of this book brought back memories, some that had long since retreated in my mind. It is a joy for me to recall those days spent with such great teammates and friends.

If you asked ten players on that team what happened to us late in the 1969 season, you very well might get ten different answers. However, I think each would tell you about the special relation-

ship that existed between the players, and about the special relationship between the players and the Cub fans. I hope as you read this account of that magical season, you will in some small way feel how great it was for those of us who were there.

This book is a personal journey, allowing me to experience all over again the peaks and valleys of 1969. Doug has precisely captured the emotions of leading the National League for most of the year and then watching that lead slip away in a painful September in Chicago. What hurts the most is our failure to finish what we started for the great fans of the Chicago Cubs.

Don Kessinger

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INTRODUCTION

For the first time in a Cubbie generation, without fear of ridicule or confinement to an asylum, I can safely say that I expect a National League pennant this year.

—Jay Mariotti, *Chicago Sun-Times*,
February 18, 2004

Over the last hundred years there has been no shortage of philosophy on the connective metaphor of baseball to “life.” In addition to serving all of the emotions that exist within the human condition, baseball has also long been viewed as an instrument for bringing subcultures of the United States together in harmony. Other institutions have tried to do the same, but few have been as successful. As one example, educational reformer Horace Mann claimed in the 1840s that a common elementary school experience for all citizens would be “the great equalizer of society; the balance wheel of the social machinery.” In relationship to baseball, the idea of a level social playing field has

been described no better than by President Ronald Reagan in a speech he delivered shortly after his final term in office. Addressing a group of aspiring sports broadcasters, he asked the audience to picture a downtown corporate office building late at night, with most of the workers gone for the day. A custodian is emptying the wastebaskets in each of the rooms, while the president of the company is working diligently on some final paperwork inside an office. In the midst of their jobs, however, both individuals are drawn to a radio that is sitting on a cabinet in the hallway. The home team is playing an important baseball game, and the two men stare transfixed at the motionless black box as the sounds of the ballpark pour forth. For a single instant, socioeconomic class is washed away as both men cheer wildly for a big hit, holler with anger at a bad call by the umpire, and question the removal of the starting pitcher by the home team manager. It is a moment in time when race, age, gender, and social class do not matter—the only thing that does is allegiance to the home team.

This scene exemplifies the small, nearly unnoticeable events that draw people together within the great exchange of individuals within the United States of America. More of such lessons were needed in the turbulent American society of the 1960s, a society burdened by growing mistrust between the “Establishment” and the younger generation, as issues of war, poverty, and civil rights dominated the American consciousness.

But once again—as had been the case during the Great Depression, World War II, and the Korean Conflict—baseball helped stabilize American society by providing a diversion from the unpleasant issues that overshadowed everyday living. In 1941, with Joe DiMaggio of the New York Yankees chasing the consecutive-game hitting record, a new phrase entered the nation’s “cultural literacy,” as former University of Virginia English professor E. D. Hirsch calls changes in social dialect. While stopping at a roadside café in Rolla or Omaha, in Durham or Dallas, the traveler always asked the same question: “Did he get one today?” In 1969—a year that culminated a decade of national unrest—different types of people could walk into the very same cafés and

ask, “Did the Cubs win today?” It was a topic on the minds of many, and—in line with Dr. Hirsch’s definition of cultural literacy—one needed to know how to “speak the language” to stay in communication with the rest of society.

In writing books about baseball seasons, I have always tried to weave the happenstances of sport into the milieu of society at the given time. Baseball, as much as any other American institution, places our lives in an historical context that enriches our existence and serves to remind us that our lives are divided into increments of time. I pull the stories for the following pages from the events of 1969, a year for which anyone old enough to remember can recall his or her circumstances in one of the most uncertain epochs in the nation’s history. Like most annual occasions, the arrival of the baseball playoffs, the Super Bowl, or New Year’s Eve prompts us to remember the same event from the previous year and to mark the progress in our lives over the past 365 days. For while we sometimes can’t remember the names of all our relatives, we can certainly remember where we were when Vinatieri made the kick or when Bartman and Alou collided.

Miracle Collapse

The Lip, the Windy City, and a Society on the Move

Leo Durocher is a man with an infantile capacity for immediately making a bad thing worse.

—Branch Rickey

The crackle of the voices through the microphone could barely be heard over the airwaves. WDAP was just a tiny radio station on Chicago's North Side, struggling to survive, when on June 1, 1924, a man named Elliott Jenkins from the *Chicago Tribune* newspaper marched in and announced that things were about to change. The station's facilities soon received a complete overhaul—including its call letters. Jenkins spoke to the masses with a few, simple words that would change Chicago broadcasting forever.

"This is WGN, formerly WDAP."

The letters were short for "World's Greatest Newspaper," a moniker that was placed at the top of every edition of the *Tribune*. The paper's venture into radio had actually begun three years earlier, when the city's first station, Westinghouse's KYW, starting receiving many of its stories and market reports from the news-