



Three Nights in August

by [Buzz Bissinger](#)

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THE *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLER NOW IN PAPERBACK WITH A NEW AFTERWORD

Selected as a Best Book of the Year by the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, and the *Rocky Mountain News*

"Superb . . . a fascinating look inside the day-to-day, game-by-game, inning-by-inning managing of a professional baseball team." — John Grisham, *New York Times Book Review*

"Plenty of books have taken us inside baseball, but *August* takes us directly inside players' heads." — *Entertainment Weekly*

"An intimate and revealing look at one of baseball's best minds at work." — *USA Today*

About the Book

What happens when one of our greatest writers is given unprecedented access to one of the great minds in major league baseball? In the case of St. Louis Cardinals manager Tony La Russa, the third-winningest baseball manager of all time, and the best-selling, Pulitzer Prize–winning author Buzz Bissinger (*Friday Night Lights*), the result is *Three Nights in August: Strategy, Heartbreak, and Joy Inside the Mind of a Manager*, now available in paperback with a provocative new afterword.

Set during a spectacular three-game series between the Cardinals and their rivals the Chicago Cubs, *Three Nights in August* is an extraordinary peek behind the scenes at the strategy, luck, and emotions that contribute to the creation of what La Russa calls "beautiful baseball."

Drawing on unprecedented access to La Russa and the Cardinals' dugout, Bissinger gives us a portrayal of a national pastime that is more complex — and more human — than any that has come before. He examines countless facets of the game, including:

- Dramatic recent changes in how the game is played, from the decline of base stealing to the epidemic of home runs.
- Equally dramatic changes "above players' necks," as La Russa says. With salaries and pressure skyrocketing, many of them now play more selfishly, putting their own stats ahead of winning ballgames.
- The altered role of the manager. Strategy still matters, but psychology now matters to a greater extent, as motivating players has become more important — and more difficult — than ever.
- Frank revelations about baseball's darker side, from steroid use to beanball retaliation to the high emotional toll paid by players' families.
- Rare insights on baseball's most intense moments, from the deep grief that followed the sudden death of ace pitcher Darryl Kile to the pure, childlike joy of victory.

Bissinger also furthers the debate on major league managerial style and strategy in his new afterword.

Three Nights in August combines La Russa's decades of experience with Bissinger's narrative eye for a frank, emotional, and often surprising view of the managerial process and the game itself. After you visit the ballpark in their shoes, the game will never be the same.

About Buzz Bissinger and Tony La Russa

Buzz Bissinger is the best-selling author of *Friday Night Lights*, which was named the best sports book of the past twenty-five years by ESPN and was recently made into a hit movie, as well as author of *A Prayer for the City*. He has won the Pulitzer Prize and the Livingston Award for his journalism and is a contributing editor at *Vanity Fair*.

During his twenty-five years as a manager of the Oakland Athletics, the Chicago White Sox, and now the St. Louis Cardinals, **Tony La Russa** has won more games than any current manager and ranks third of all-time. He has been named Manager of the Year a record five times.

Tony La Russa's **Animal Rescue Foundation** (ARF) saves the lives of loving dogs and cats that have run out of time at public shelters. ARF gives another chance to dogs and cats that otherwise may be killed. The foundation provides the care and attention they need, including spaying or neutering, until ARF finds them a new home. ARF's People Connect programs strengthen the human-animal bond for the elderly, residents of assisted-living centers, teens at juvenile halls, high school and grade school students, and young children through programs that are national models of excellence. ARF programs allow people to experience the unconditional love and acceptance of dogs and cats. People rescuing animals . . . animals rescuing people.

A Conversation with Buzz Bissinger about *Three Nights in August*

***Three Nights in August* is the first sports-related book you have written since *Friday Night Lights* was published in 1990. Why the fifteen-year wait?**

I have never seen myself as a writer exclusively in the sports genre. My second book, *A Prayer for the City*, was about urban America, and little of my magazine work for *Vanity Fair* has had to do with sports. Writing about sports is easy, but writing about sports well is difficult, at least for me it's difficult, and I guess it took me nearly fifteen years to find a sports-related subject that appealed to me as much as *Three Nights in August* did.

So, what was the appeal?

I love baseball. Despite the success of *Friday Night Lights*, I love baseball far more than football. And the willingness of Tony La Russa to give me unprecedented access to a major league clubhouse in the form of the 2003 St. Louis Cardinals was too good to pass up.

How did you get involved with La Russa in the first place?

His agent called me out of the blue in November of 2002 asking if I might be interested in collaborating on a book with La Russa. Collaborations are tricky and usually compromising. I had been approached about them in the past by the likes of Rudy Giuliani and Boone Arledge but said no.

Why did you agree to collaborate with La Russa?

Because of my love of baseball, and also because I have been intrigued by La Russa for more than twenty years because of that unapproachable glare he throws off in the dugout. I knew he was intense — to put it mildly — and I was intrigued by the idea of cracking through that intensity to get into the wonderful subculture of the dugout. By the time La Russa is through managing, he will rank third on the list of all-time wins behind Connie Mack and John McGraw. He has a place in the legacy of the game. Plus, the rules of the collaboration totally changed in this case.

How so?

In the beginning this was very much a traditional collaboration, your basic as-told-to. But the more La Russa and I talked, the more we wanted to create something timeless about baseball, or at least something we thought might be timeless. So we came up with the idea of framing the book around the microcosm of baseball, the three-game series. At the same time, La Russa promised to give me remarkable access to the Cardinals' clubhouse during the 2003 season.

Did he follow through on the promise?

Yes. We both wanted the book to have the tone and power of observation of *Friday Night Lights*. It required a willingness on La Russa's part to be unflinchingly candid about various aspects of his baseball life, and he never wavered from that. The fact that he is still an active manager made his commitment all the more remarkable.

How candid is La Russa? Are there any examples that come to mind?

There is a section of the book in which both La Russa and his wife talk about the brutal rigors of the baseball life and how, to make their marriage work, they agreed that Tony would spend eight months of his life managing the Cardinals in St. Louis while Elaine took care of their two daughters in California. In a lifetime of reporting, I can't recall such honesty. It goes to the heart not just of managing but of the regrettable mistakes that all ambitious professionals make in the name of perfecting their craft. As a young manager, Tony did things that had repercussions on his family life. He has deep regrets about them, but he also knows he cannot take them back.

Is *Three Nights in August* just about La Russa?

Definitely not. The goal was to tunnel into the subculture of the dugout in a way that had never been done before: to give readers rare insight into the delicious strategy of the game and how a manager makes the decisions that he does in the "real time" setting of a game and a three-game series. But the book is as much personal as it is strategic, and it branches out to portray the various players and coaches that make up a baseball team.

It also weaves in some of the indelible personalities that La Russa has encountered during his career, including Jose Canseco, Rickey Henderson, Dennis Eckersley, and Dave Stewart, and touches on the saga of Rick Ankiel and the tragic death of pitcher Darryl Kile.

What did you find the most surprising?

I always thought that most of what a manager did was strategic. But during the season it became clear to me that much of what a manager does — the greater part of it — is psychological. Motivating players today is more difficult than ever because of the massive amounts of money they all make, and to be a successful manager, you have to be equal parts Doctor Phil, Doctor Ruth, and Doctor Seuss. It's why much of the book has to do with La Russa's interaction with players ranging from Albert Pujols to Scott Rolen to Jim Edmonds to Matt Morris to J.D. Drew.

What about the strategy of the game itself? What was most surprising?

In my journalistic life I have written about figures ranging from President Clinton to Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell to New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, and none of them come close to La Russa in terms of meticulous — almost maniacal — preparation, leaving nothing to chance. Managers and their coaches come up with detailed game plans just like football coaches do. Everything is thought out ahead of time, whether it's executing a hit-and-run or playing the infield-in or figuring out whom to hit with a pitch in retaliation for one of your players getting hit by a pitch. It says something obviously about La Russa's style, but it says more about the layers and complexities of baseball.

After spending the past two years of your life thinking and eating and breathing baseball, do you still love the game?

I love it even more despite all the efforts of the game to cannibalize itself, whether it's steroids or player strikes or greed. The nuance and complexity of the game is still breathtaking and *Three Nights in August* restored my faith.

There are several references to Michael Lewis's *Moneyball* in the book. Was *Three Nights in August* specifically written as an antidote to that book?

Absolutely not. *Three Nights in August* was begun months before I had ever heard of *Moneyball*. But since that book has been brought up, I might as well come out and say it: Lewis's book just doesn't hold up very well. He is a wonderful writer, and he's even better at taking a thesis and not letting anything get in the way of it, but the game doesn't operate on statistics alone, treating players as undervalued equities.

Are you saying that statistics and computer analysis have no place in baseball?

Tony La Russa pays as much attention to statistics as any baseball manager does. He believes that past performance is a key indicator of future performance. Much of his life as a manager is spent breaking down statistics and trying to figure out why a certain batter does better against a certain pitcher, and why a certain pitcher does better against a certain hitter. He believes there are technical reasons, but he also believes that heart and desire and reactions to pressure are fundamental to how a player performs and doesn't perform.

He has been around long enough to understand that all players — all of us actually — are creatures of human nature. His goal as a manager is to tap into human nature. No computer analysis, no matter how deft, is ever going to be a substitute for his own strategic and psychological analysis. And thank God for that, because otherwise there would be no point to playing the game at all.

Extraordinary Praise for *Three Nights in August*

"**Superb** . . . a fascinating look inside the day-to-day, game-by-game, inning-by-inning managing of a professional baseball team." — John Grisham, *New York Times Book Review*

"An intimate and revealing look at one of baseball's best minds at work." — *USA Today*

"Plenty of books have taken us inside baseball, but *August* **takes us directly inside players' heads.**" — *Entertainment Weekly*

"**The best baseball book I've read in a decade** . . . pure joy for fans." — *Rocky Mountain News*

"Probably the **best baseball book of the year.**" — *San Diego Union-Tribune*

"**A terrific read.**" — Albert Chen, SportsIllustrated.com

"Already being talked about as **the most 'inside' baseball book ever.**" — Bill Madden, *New York Daily News*

"Bissinger depicts both the timeless appeal of a game that is rooted in the past and the unsatisfying changes wrought by big-money contracts." — *Wall Street Journal*

"**A great read** because it is about people more than it is about a game." — *Cincinnati Enquirer*

"A solid, engaging term paper on intermediate and advanced baseball strategy . . . **more than enough to please any fan of the national pastime.**" — *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

"**Bissinger does a masterful job** of encompassing the entire season — and, indeed, La Russa's entire life — in those three games." — *Cleveland Plain Dealer*

"Mixing classic baseball stories with little-known details and an exclusive perspective, this work should appeal to any baseball fan." — *Publishers Weekly*, starred review

"A real treat for scholarly baseball fans, and a better management book than most on the business shelves." — *Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

"Great writing alters the familiar. Just when you think nothing more could be written about baseball, *Three Nights in August* reveals the sport like no book before. Buzz Bissinger is a master of focus, zeroing in on the battle that unfolds minute-by-minute beneath the deceptively placid surface of the game. **It is a masterpiece of reporting and writing, and flat-out one of the best books on the subject ever.**" — **Mark Bowden**, author of *Black Hawk Down* and *Killing Pablo*

"Tony La Russa is one of baseball's most intriguing figures. Buzz Bissinger is one of our most respected writers. Together, they provide **a unique and compelling view inside the game** that for so long has fascinated, rewarded, and tortured the Cardinals manager." — **Bob Costas**

"A great writer. A great manager. A great book filled with dramatic twists and turns and surprises. **In *Three Nights in August*, Buzz Bissinger has brought to baseball the same magic he brought to football in *Friday Night Lights*.**" — **Bill Belichick**, head coach, New England Patriots

"**What a great book this is.** It takes you closer to the game than you could ever get otherwise. Being a head coach, I particularly identified with the emotions Tony La Russa felt as these three nights unfolded." — **Bill Parcells**, head coach, Dallas Cowboys

"Tony La Russa is a masterful strategist and a superb motivator — in short, a great leader. ***Three Nights in August* is more than a splendid baseball book, it's a revealing, inspiring portrait of leadership under pressure.**" — **Howard Schultz**, CEO of Starbucks

"A classic baseball rivalry through the eyes of a smart, funny, intense manager. What a combination, **what a read!**" — **Tim Russert**, NBC's *Meet the Press*

"The Cubs against the Cardinals in the heat of August and of a pennant race — **this is baseball at its best. What is the best way to watch it? Through the eyes of Tony La Russa.** Readers of this finely focused study of the everyday drama of the sport of the longest season will be both exhausted and exhilarated. Exhausted by the grinding attention to detail required for the incessant decisions that managers must make. And exhilarated by La Russa's no-wasted-motion professionalism as he practices what many people preach — respect for the game." — **George F. Will**, author of *Men at Work: The Craft of Baseball*

"Tony La Russa is one of the best minds in baseball. In *Three Nights in August*, he and Buzz Bissinger offer unprecedented insights on the game, revealing the hidden decisions that affect each play. This book **proves that baseball is so much more than statistics**, and clearly demonstrates how instincts, logic, and emotion impact every game." — **Cal Ripken, Jr.**

Events for *Three Nights in August*

Philadelphia

Book signing by Buzz Bissinger and Tony La Russa
Borders Books & Music
1 South Broad Street
April 4, 2006, 5:00 – 7:00 P.M.

St. Peters, MO

Book signing by Buzz Bissinger and Tony La Russa
Barnes & Noble
Mid-Rivers Mall
320 Mid-Rivers Center Drive
April 11, 2006, 5:00 – 7:00 P.M.