

# It Ain't Over til It's Over – The Life and Times of Yogi Berra

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# Intro

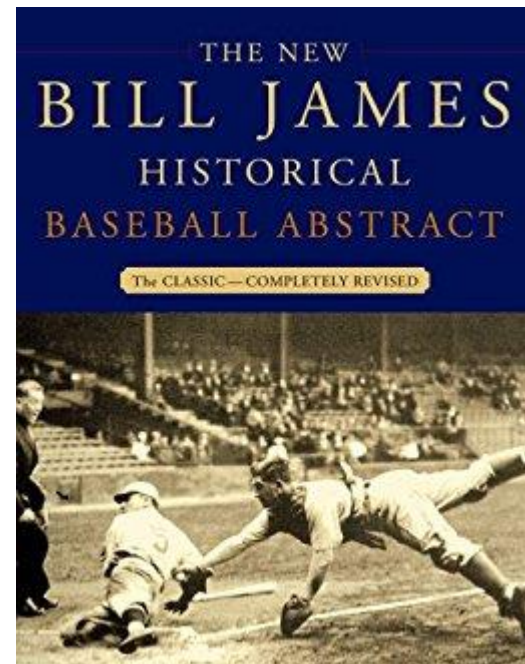
Yogi Berra is remembered today as the author of “yogisms” – but there was a lot more to him than that

# Intro

- Veteran of DDay
- Three time MVP of the American League
- One of only seven managers to win pennants in both leagues
- Perhaps the most beloved player in MLB history

# What kind of a player was he?

- Bill James, founder of sabermetrics and perhaps the most famous baseball writer of the past 40 years, rated players in his *Historical Abstract*
- When it came time to rank catchers, he ranked Yogi as the greatest catcher in baseball history
- Ahead of
  - Johnnie Bench
  - Bill Dickey
  - Gabby Harnett
  - And every other catcher in MLB history



# Yogi – the early years

- Yogi was born Lorenzo Pietro Berra to Italian immigrants in St. Louis on May 12, 1925
- He grew up in the Italian section, known as the Hill, with, among others, fellow future ballplayer Joe Garagiola
- He began playing baseball for an American Legion team, playing all positions including catcher

# Yogi – the early years

- Much to his disappointment, the hometown Cardinals signed Garagiola, not Yogi
- However, Branch Rickey, knowing he was leaving St. Louis for Brooklyn, wanted to keep Yogi for the Dodgers
- However, before he could sign Yogi, the Yankees did, sending the 18 years old to the Norfolk Tars



## Gunner's Mate Yogi

- After his one season with the Tars, Yogi became a tar of a different sort – joining the Navy
- He served as a Gunner's Mate



# Yogi the Rocket Man

- Yogi would later reminiscence that volunteers were asked to serve on rocket boats
- Thinking he would be the next Buck Rogers, Yogi eagerly signed up
- Only to be sailing off Omaha Beach on June 6, 1944



# Gunners Mate Berra remembers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vpT8vkQ1rVw>

# After the War – Coming to the Yankees

- After the war, Yogi was sent to the Newark Bears, the Yankees highest farm club
- He worked with Bill Dickey, (r) another Yankee Hall of Fame catcher, on the mechanics of catching
- Ironically, when Yogi's number 8 was retired, Bill Dickey's number 8 was retired at the same time.
- Yogi made his MLB debut on September 22, 1946, and played 7 games that season



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# After the War – Coming to the Yankees

- Yogi was up for good in the 1947 season, where he won his first World Series ring
- He played in 83 games, splitting time between catching and the outfield
- Former Senators manager Bucky Harris skippered the club



# **After the War – Coming to the Yankees**

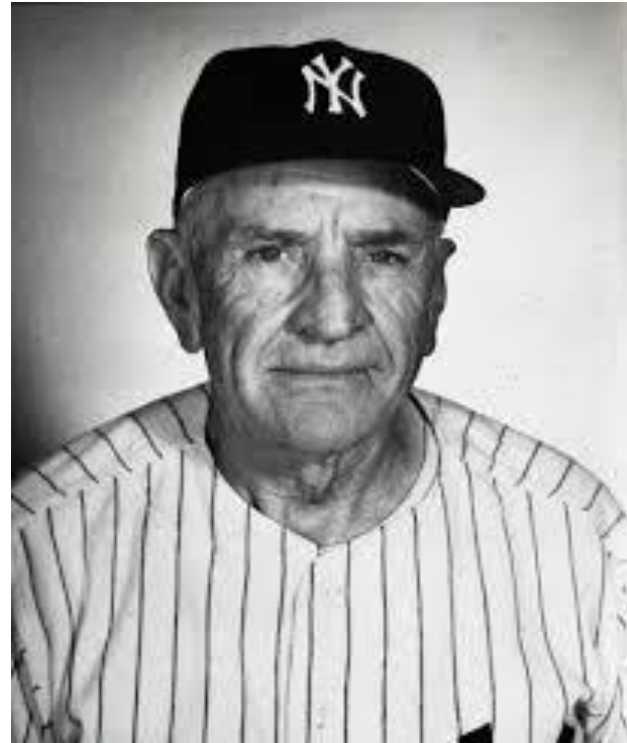
- In 1948, Yogi was a regular, still splitting time between the outfield and catching
- He made the first of his 15 all star nods, and came just short of 100 RBIs

# **After the War – Coming to the Yankees**

- However, while the Yankees won 94 games, they finished 3<sup>rd</sup>, behind Boston and league winning Cleveland
- New Yankee ownership was not satisfied with anything short of the pennant, so Harris was let go

# The Casey Stengel Era

- The Old Perfessor was managing the Oakland Oaks of the Pacific Coast League, and had the support of GM George Weiss and western scouts
- Case was introduced as Yankee manager in October 1948
- A controversial move
  - He had not had success with Boston or Brooklyn
  - He was known more as a clown



# The Casey Stengel Era

- Casey took over a team in transition –
  - Young players like Yogi, Hank Bauer, Bobby Brown
  - Vets like George McQuinn and Tommy Heinrich
- But the greatest power struggle would be with Joe DiMaggio





# 1949

- The 1949 Yankees were besieged by injuries, with DiMaggio having a foot injury that kept him out until June
- Despite the injuries, the Yankees stayed close to league leading Boston, and were 1 game back in a crucial 2 game September series in NY

# 1949

- Yogi took over as the regular catcher, behind the plate for 104 games
- In addition to a .277 batting average, Yogi socked 20 HRs and 91 RBIs

# Carmen Berra

- 1949 marked another milestone in Yogi's life – when he married Carmen Short
- They would have three sons, and be married for 65 years before her death in 2014



# Carmen Berra

- Carmen would be a part of many Yogi isms – more about them later
- The family would later consist of 11 grandchildren



# 1950

- Yogi came into his own in 1950, as Casey began to replace veterans with young players
- Yogi's roommate was Bobby Brown, who was a medical school student
- One night, while Yogi finished a comic book, and Brown a medical text, Yogi asked him "How did your book come out?"



# 1950

- The Yankees won their second straight WS, in Joe DiMaggio's last year
- Phil Rizzuto won the MVP award, and Yogi finished 3<sup>rd</sup>
- However, Yogi's stats of a .322 batting average, 28 HRs and 124 RBIs certainly were of an MVP caliber.



Payne/News

# 1951

- 1951 marked the Yankees' third straight WS win – this time over the NY Giants, who won on the shot heard round the world
- Yogi would win the first of his three MVP awards, although his HR, BA and RBI totals were all down from 1950

# 1952/1953

- The Yankees win the WS both years, beating the Brooklyn Dodgers, who continue to have to “wait until next year!”
- Yogi’s numbers again put him in the top five of MVP votes both years



# The luckiest man in baseball

- For the period from 1948 to 1956, Charlie Silvera was Yogi's backup
- During that time, he earned 6 world series rings
- However, due to Yogi's iron man status, in 9 years, he had a total of 429 ABs, or an average of 48 a year.
- There were worse ways of making a living in the 1950's!



# Interlude – Integration and the Yankees

- By 1955, there were only two teams that had not integrated – the Yankees and the Boston Red Sox
- The Yankees would go first, and the Red Sox would not integrate until 1959, when they brought up the immortal Pumpsie Green – later to be famous for a planned trip to the Holy Land



# Interlude – Integration and the Yankees

- The Yankees had a great candidate in their system – Vic Power, a 1B with a great glove and great numbers
- 1952 – led the IL in 2B and 3B with a .331 average
- 1953 – led IL with a .349 average
- Yet he was never called up – the rumors were he had white girlfriends
- Instead, he was traded to Philadelphia



VIC POWER, Los Angeles Angels

# Interlude – Integration and the Yankees

- George Weiss, the long term GM of the Yankees, while giving public lip service to integration, was more direct in private.

- There, he noted

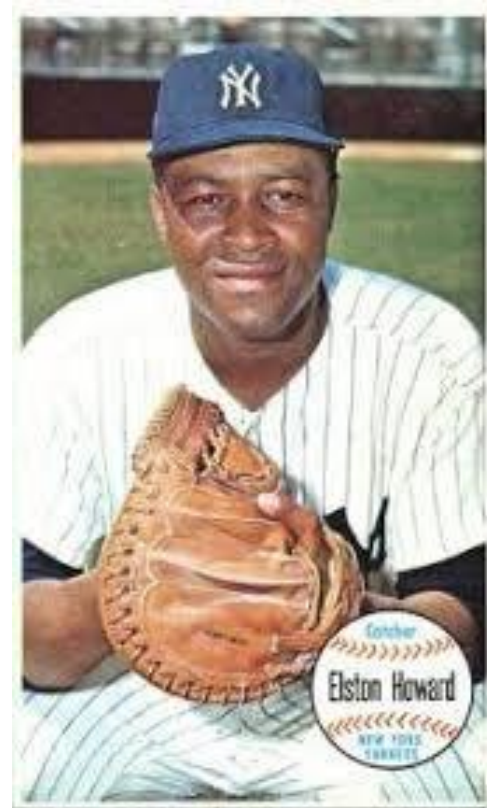
*I will never allow a black man to wear a Yankee uniform. Box-holders from Westchester don't want that sort of crowd. They would be offended to have to sit with n\*\*\*\*\*s*



# Interlude – Integration and the Yankees

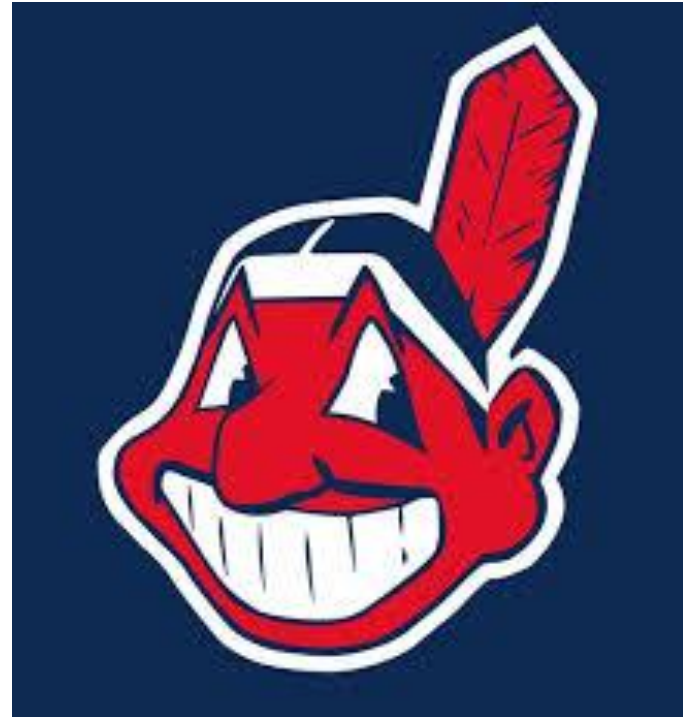
- Finally, in Elston Howard, the Yankees found a perfect candidate – someone who would not rock the boat.
- He was a catcher, so would play behind and finally overtake Yogi
- Of his speed, Casey famously said:

*Well, when they finally get me a n\*\*\*\*r, I get the only one who can't run.*



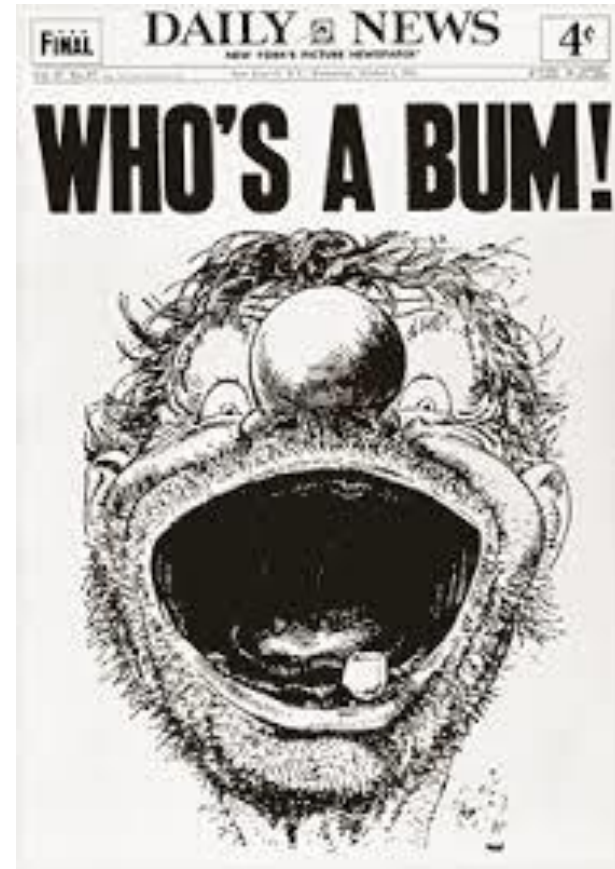
# 1954

- 1954 was a strange year for the Yankees – they had a record of 103-51, the best record for the Stengel Yankees
- Yet they finished 2<sup>nd</sup> to the Indians, who went 111-43
- For Yogi, though, it was a banner year, as he hit .307 with 22 hrs and 125 RBIs, winning his second MVP award



# 1955 – “Next Year”

- Ho Hum – another Yankees Dodgers World Series
- This time – a little different
- Behind a 2-0 shutout by Johnny Podres, the Brooklyn Dodgers won their only World Series



# 1956

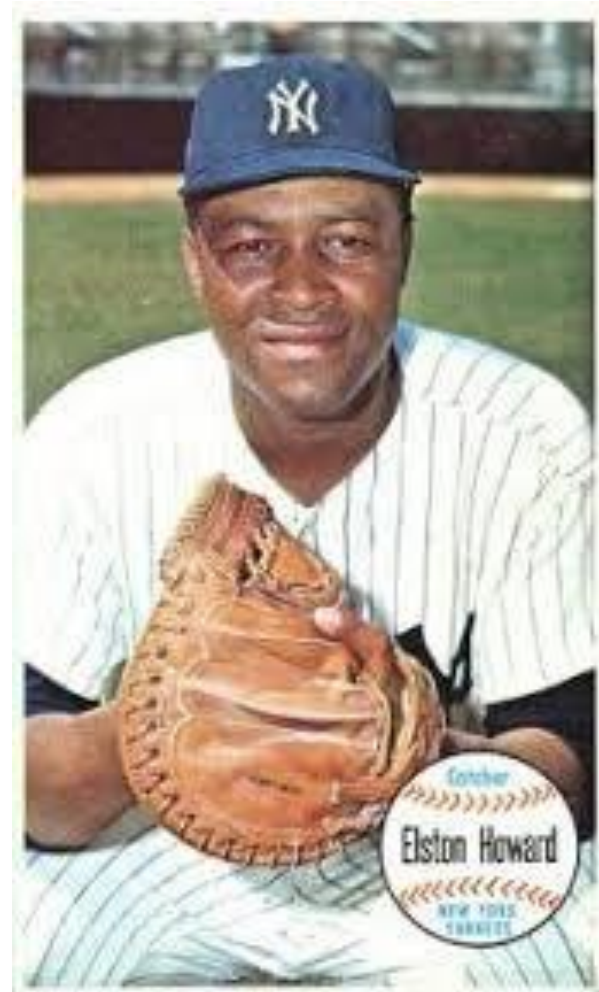
- Ho hum – the Yankees win yet another World Series.
- Yogi finishes second in MVP voting to Mickey Mantle, who has to win the Triple Crown to beat Yogi.
- From 1950 to 1956, Yogi has caught between 133 and 149 games per season (remember, only 154 games in a season!)





# 1957

- Ho ho hum – the Yankees win yet another World Series.
- Elston Howard is now relieving Yogi of his iron man status, starting 22 games while Yogi still starts 108
- It's a down year batting for the 32 year old Yogi, whose .251 BA is the lowest of his career
- He still finishes 14<sup>th</sup> in the MVP race



# 1958

- By 1958, the year the Yankees win the AL pennant but lose the WS, catching duties are more split – 88 starts for Yogi, 64 for Elston
- The two play in the outfield when the other is catching
- Yogi's numbers are still down, but he remains in the top 20 in MVP votes



**NY Yankee "Secret Weapon":** One of the "secrets" of the continuing success of the New York Yankees, youthful Elston Howard shadows veteran catcher Yogi Berra. Into whose position he'll move when Yogi slows up. Howard is a valuable Yankee because he hits long ball.

# 1959

- In 1959, for only the second time since 1949, the Yankees do not win the AL pennant
- Ironically Al Lopez manages both teams, the 54 Indians and the 59 White Sox
- Rumblings are heard in the front office that Casey Stengel, now 69, is getting too old to manage



# 1960

- In 1960, the Yankees win the AL pennant, only to fall to the Pirates in the 9<sup>th</sup> inning of game 7
- The 35 year old Yogi is now catching less games than Howard, but still is an All Star and in the top 20 of the MVP vote

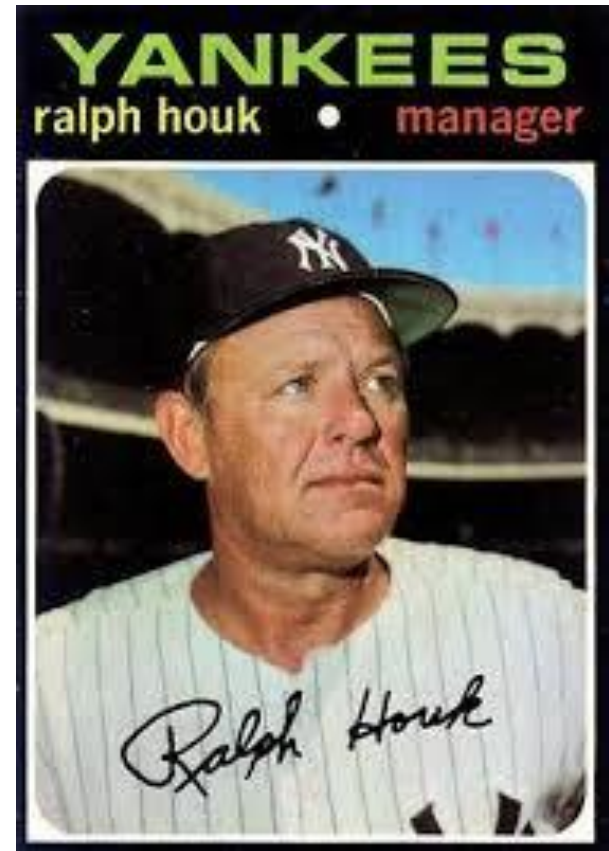


# The Earth shifts

- After the 1960 WS loss, GM George Weiss retires, and Manager Casey Stengel is “fired”
- As Casey said at his final press conference, “Quit, fired, whatever you please, I don't care...I just won't make the mistake of being 70 again.”
- So new leadership of the Yankees
  - New GM after 13 years
  - New Manager after 12 years

# The new leadership

- Roy Hamey takes over as GM
- Long term Yankee coach (and former backup catcher) Ralph Houk becomes manager
- Known as the Major, he was awarded the Silver Star, Bronze Star and Purple Heart for his WWII service, which included the Battle of the Bulge



# 1961

- The 1961 Yankees have long been considered one of the greatest teams of all time
- With their record of 109-53, they had 6 players with more than 20 HRs, led by record setting Roger Maris with 61 and Mickey Mantle with 54

# 1961

- Yogi was now the regular LF, contributing 22 HRs and still finishing in the top 25 for MVP
- Howard, who would hit .348, would catch 106 games, while Johnny Blanchard (who hit 21 HRs) would catch 37 and Yogi 15.



# New challenges for the Yankees

- After the 1956 season, with the Dodgers and Giants heading to California, the Yankees had NY all to themselves
- However, in a 1962 expansion, the NL welcomed the New York Mets
- The GM of the Mets was George Weiss, back from retirement
- And also coming back was their manager, Casey Stengel

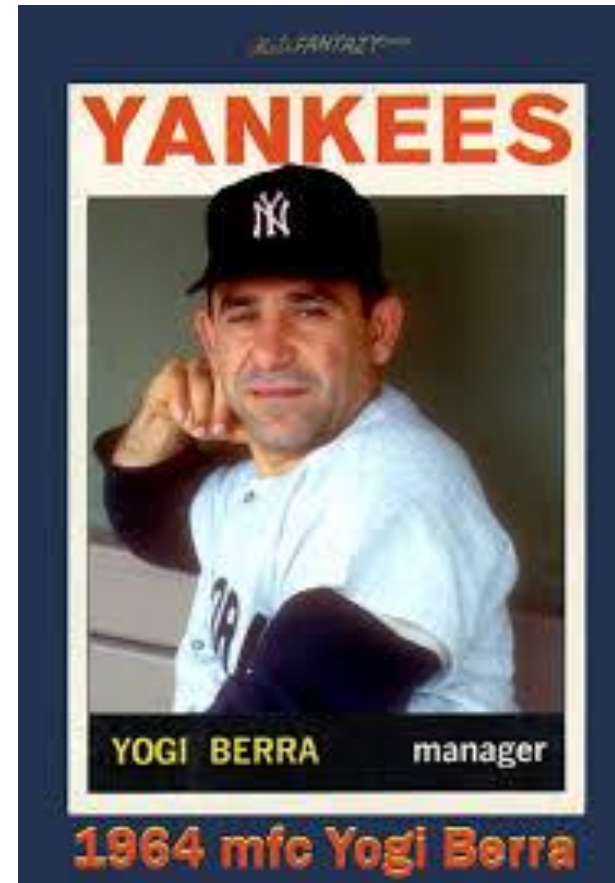


## New challenges for the Yankees

- The Yankees won the WS in 1962, and while losing to the Dodgers in the WS in 1963, had now won 4 straight AL pennants
- Meanwhile, the Mets lost a horrific 120 games in 1962, and barely improved to 111 losses in 1963
- Despite this, the Mets in their second season were only a few hundred thousand in attendance behind the pennant winning Yankees
- The solution – well, if you can't have Casey as your go to guy, what about .....

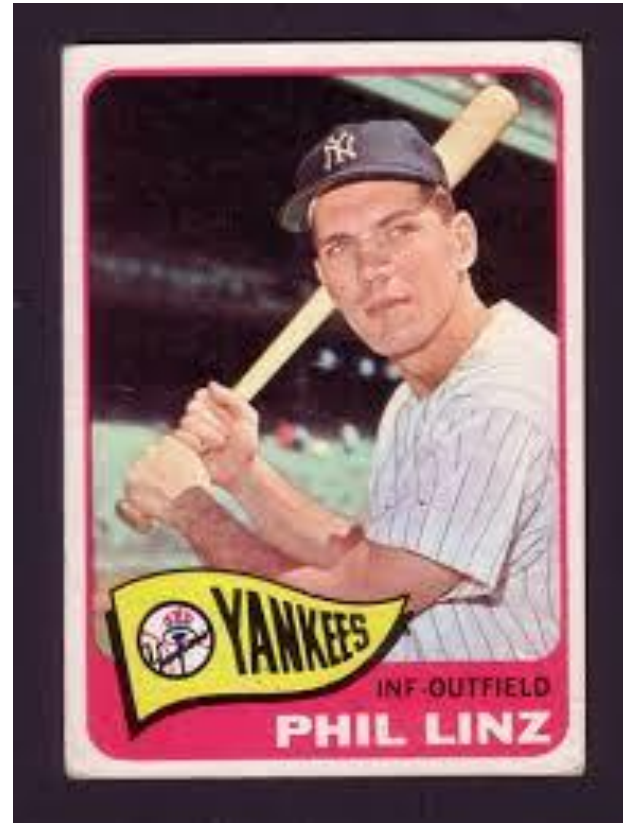
# Now managing the Yankees.....

- So in 1964, after two seasons of declining production, the 39 year old Yogi Berra becomes manager of the Yankees, as Ralph Houk moves upstairs to become the GM
- While coming off a pennant winning season, the Yankees are getting progressively older, without much coming up from the farm
- However, expectations are as always for a WS victory



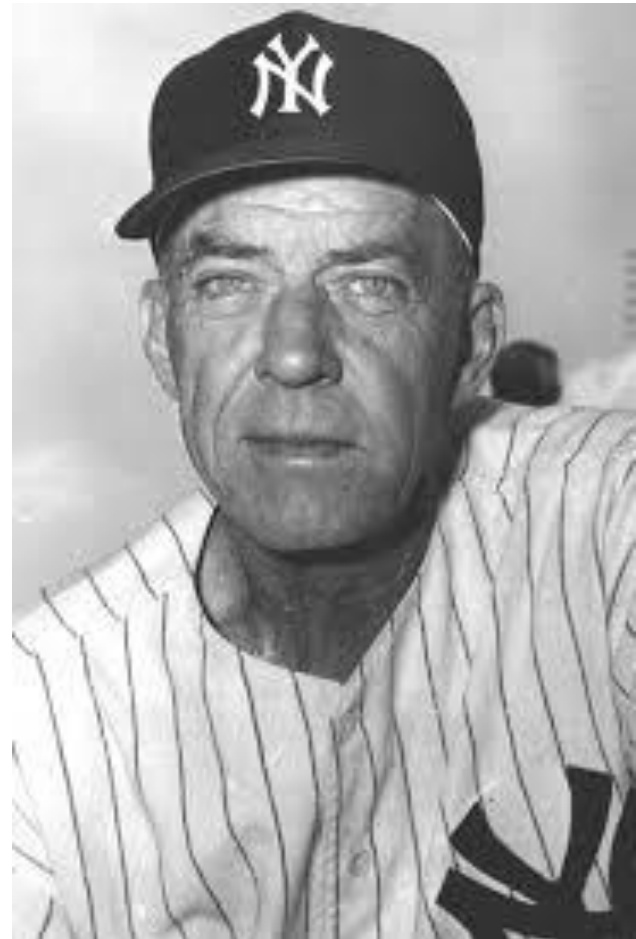
# Now managing the Yankees.....

- As the aging Yankees were hit with a series of injuries, they stayed near the middle of the pack until the late summer.
- In August was the famed Phil Linz harmonica incident
- The result of this incident was two fold:
  - Houk decided at that point to fire Yogi after the season
  - The team felt that Yogi was now the manager and no longer a player, with fuller authority



## Now managing the Yankees.....

- To everyone's amazement, the Yankees caught fire and ending up winning the pennant with 99 wins
- They lost to the Cardinals in a 7 game WS
- Shortly after the WS, the Yankees fired Yogi and hired Johnny Keane, the manager of the WS winning Cardinals



# Meet the Mets

- Yogi didn't stay unemployed long – he immediately signed with the cross town Mets as a player-coach
- In addition to coaching first base, he also caught 4 games before retiring
- He also formed with Warren Spahn the oldest (and perhaps ugliest) battery in history



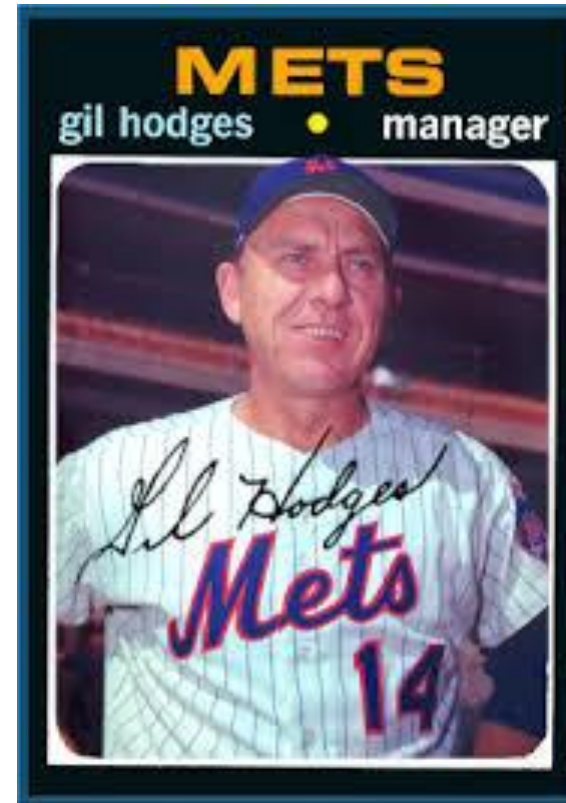
## Meet the Mets

- Yogi would serve on the staff of Mets managers Casey Stengel, Wes Westrum and Gil Hodges
- In 1969, he won yet another WS ring with the Miracle Mets.



## Return to managing

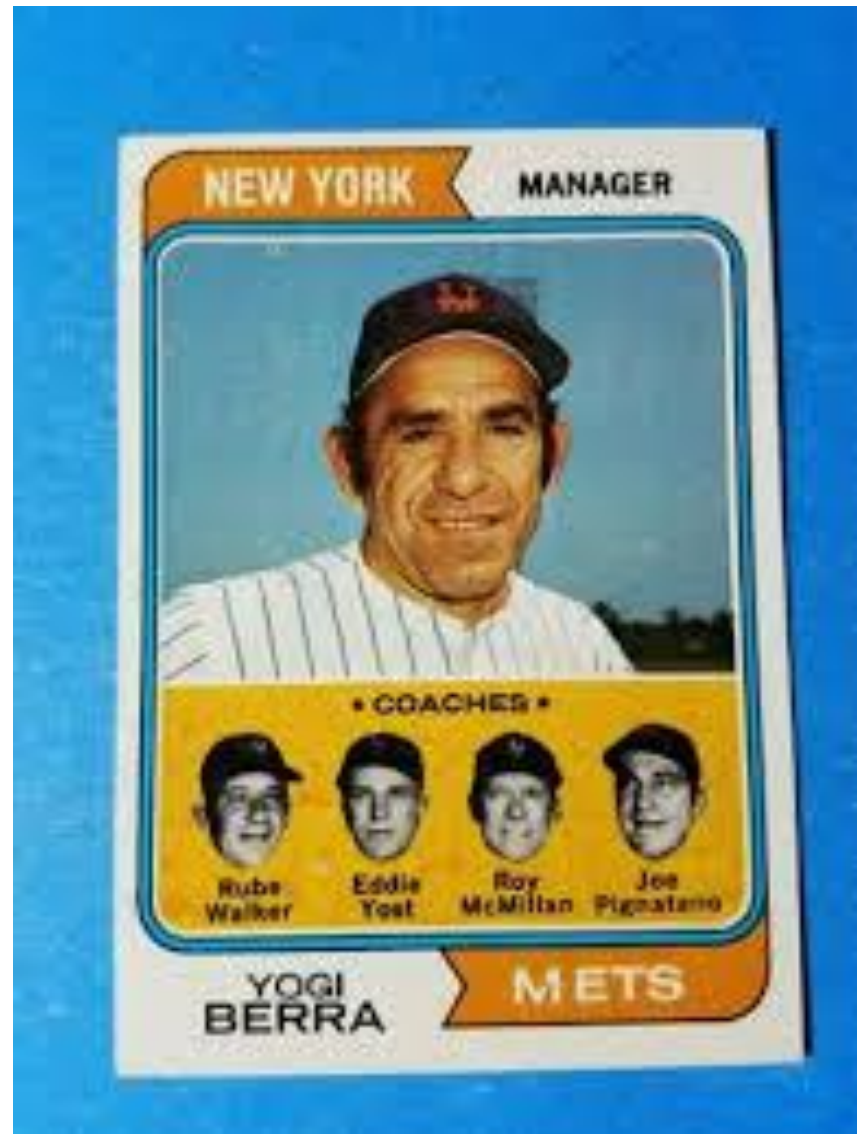
- As those of you who took my unions class know, baseball players went out on strike during spring training 1972
- While playing golf during that time, Mets manager Gil Hodges died of a heart attack





## Return to managing

While there was some controversy as to the timing (on the day of Hodges' funeral) there was general support for the idea of Yogi becoming the Mets manager



# 1972

- The 1972 season was played in the aftermath of the spring training strike
- The Mets finished 83-73, a slight uptick from the 1972 season

# 1973

- The Mets were hit with a slew of injuries in the 1973, and by July, were in last place, but only 6.5 games out of first
- When asked if Yogi should be fired, President M. Donald Grant (feel free to boo) said not unless the fans demanded it

# 1973

- So the NY Daily News ran a poll – who should be fired – manager Yogi, GM Joe McDonald or President Grant
- Grant won in a landslide

# 1973- Ya Gotta believe

- Trying to shed his patrician ways, and to show support for the team, Grant addressed the team in a meeting
- Grant told the team they could win if they only believed in themselves
- In the back was maniac relief pitcher Tug McGraw, who soon starting screaming “Ya gotta believe! Ya gotta believe! “



# 1973- Ya Gotta believe

- With this as their rallying cry, the Mets, still in last place as of September 11, went 21-8 in September to clinch the pennant the day after the season ended
- Their .509 winning percentage remains the lowest in history for a division winner

# 1973- Ya Gotta believe

- Astonishingly, they beat the reigning NL champs, the Big Red Machine in the NL playoffs
- They then lost a thrilling 7 game WS

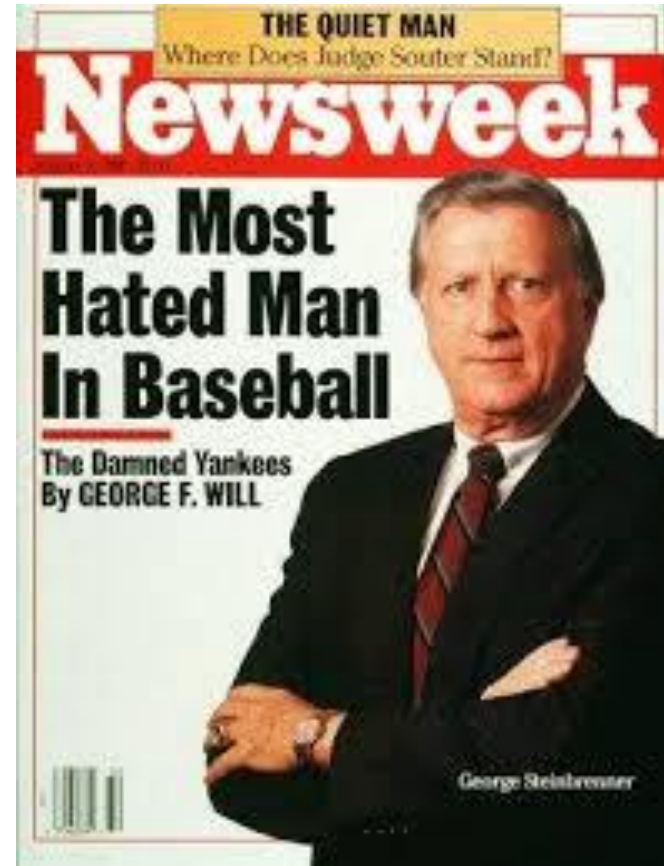
# Post 1973

- After two mediocre seasons, Yogi is fired as Mets manager midway through the 1975 season.
- His record as manager of the Mets is 292-296, after a 99-63 season with the 1964 Yankees
- He remains one of only 7 managers to go to the WS with an AL and NL team



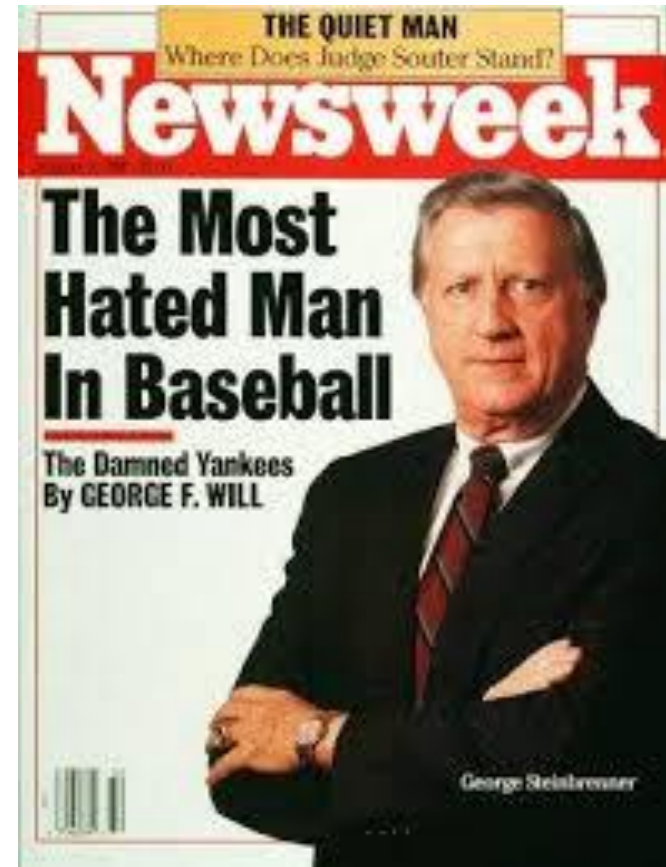
# Yankees Part 2

- Once again, Yogi does not remain unemployed long
- For the 1976 season, he is hired as a coach for the NY Yankees
- The Yankees are just entering their “Bronx Zoo” days under George Steinbrenner, who goes through managers like tissue paper
- Somehow, Yogi remains a coach until the start of the 1984 season



# Yankees Part 2

- Having gone through Bob Lemon and Billy Martin more than once, and many other managers, the Boss turns to Yogi to manage the 1984 Yankees
- Yogi manages them to a credible 87-75 record, but only in 3<sup>rd</sup> place, which is nowhere in George world
- Yogi agrees to come back for the 1985 season only with the promise he will get to manage all season



# Yankees Part 2

- With the team off to a 4-12 start, Steinbrenner decides to fire Yogi, notwithstanding his promise
- To make matters worse, he does not do it himself, but gets GM Clyde King (r) to do the deed
- This creates a rift between Yogi and the Yankees that will last a decade



# On to Houston

- As always, Yogi is not unemployed long
- A NJ neighbor, John McMullen, is the Astros owner, and asks Yogi to coach for them.
- So Yogi dons the hideous togs of the Astros from 1985 to 1989
- The highlight was the series against the 1986 Mets.
- Yogi finally retires after the 1989 season at age 64



# Retirement

- In retirement, Yogi's greatest work is the Yogi Berra Museum and Learning Center, on the campus of Montclair State University, near his longtime home of Montclair NJ
- Besides having memorabilia from his career, there is a baseball field, where, among others, the Montclair State Redbirds play



# 1995

## Reconciliation

- For a decade, Yogi refused to go to Yankee Stadium after he was fired, despite efforts by the Yankees to honor him
- Yankee announcer Suzyn Waldman brokered a truce and on January 5, 1999, Steinbrenner made a pilgrimage to Montclair to apologize to Yogi





# 1995

## Reconciliation

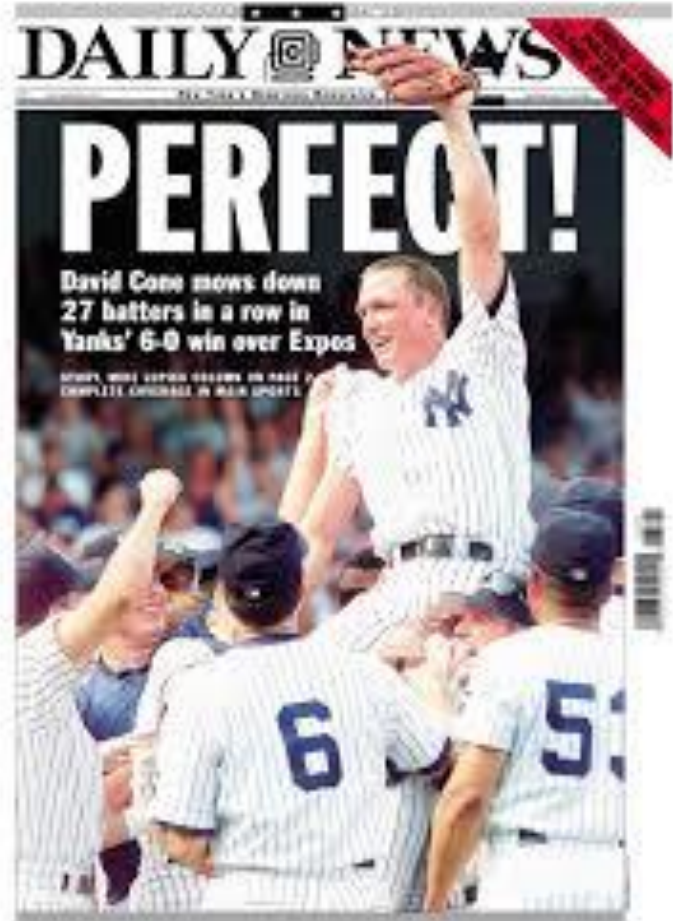
- Yogi's first words to Steinbrenner – "You're 10 minutes late!"
- Steinbrenner told Yogi "I know I made a mistake by not letting you go personally. It's the worst mistake I ever made in baseball."
- With that, Yogi returned the Yankees, attending Old Timers games and working in Spring Training



# 1995

## Reconciliation

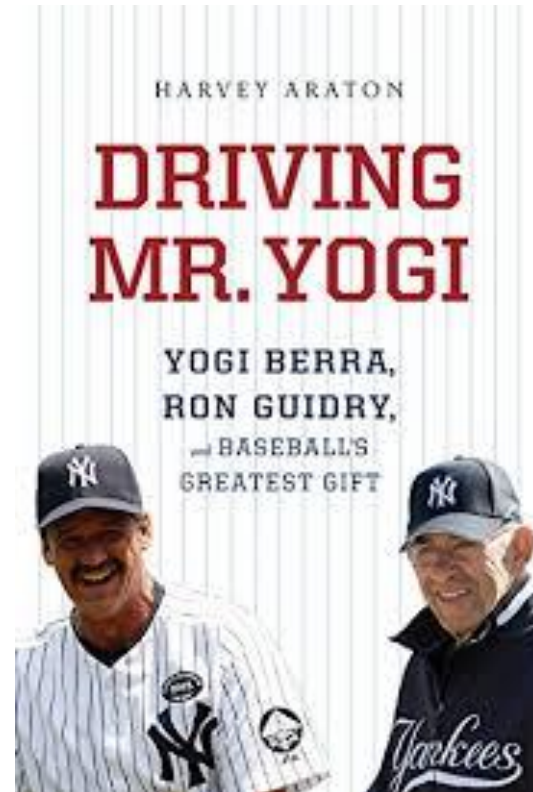
- Most famously, the Yankees held Yogi Berra Day on July 18, 1999
- David Cone picked that day to pitch only the third perfect game in NY Yankees history
- The first was by Don Larsen in the 1956 WS, and before the 1999 game, Larsen threw out the first pitch to Yogi.





# Yogi and the Yankees

- For almost 10 years, Yogi was a special catching instructor, working with long time Yankees Joe Girardi and Jose Posada
- Famously, he would be picked up by ex Yankee ace Ron Guidry at the airport and driven around by Guidry
- Guidry turned his experiences into a book – “Driving Mr. Yogi.”



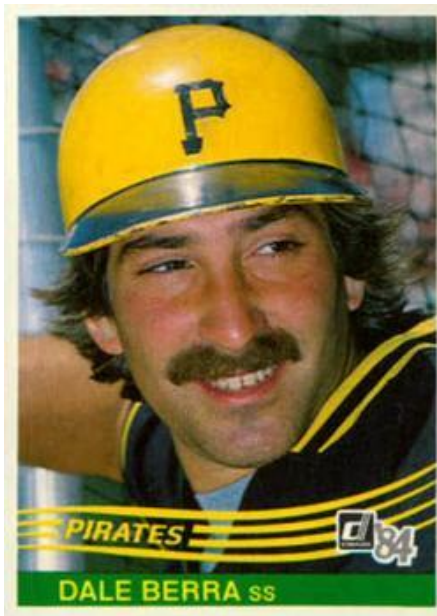
# Yogi's family

- For 65 years, Yogi was married to the love of his life, Carmen.
- They would have three sons together, 11 grandchildren and one great grandchild

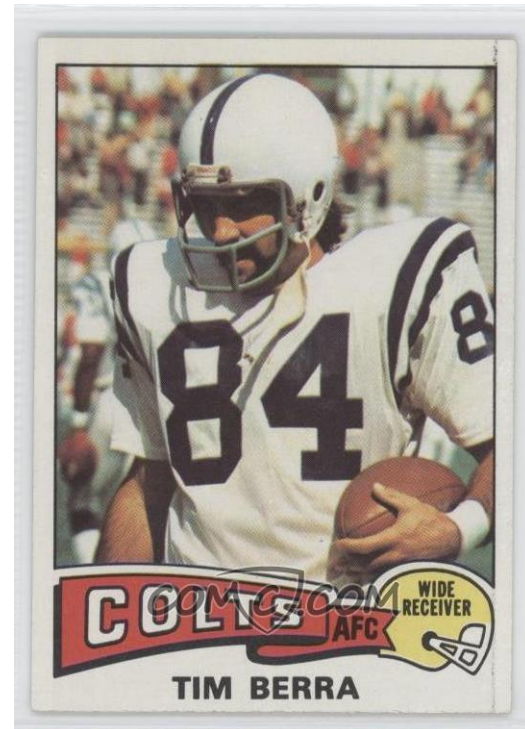


# Two of Yogi's sons would also become professional athletes

**Dale Berra – IF for the Pirates,  
Yankees and Astros**



**Tim Berra – WR for the Colts**



# Yogi's family

- The tradition continues into the next generation .
- Lindsay Berra, daughter of Larry Berra (who played in the minors) is a baseball analyst for ESPN, and speaks often on Yogi



# Joined forever

- Carmen died of a stroke on March 6, 2014, shortly after their 65<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary
- Yogi followed on September 22, 2015 – the 69<sup>th</sup> anniversary of being called up to the Yankees





# Yogi isms

In an interview, Yogi once said

*"When I'm sittin' down to dinner with the family, stuff just pops out. And they'll say, 'Dad, you just said another one.' And I don't even know what the heck I said,"*

# Yogi isms

- 90 percent of baseball is mental; the other half is physical
- Nobody goes to that restaurant anymore. It's too crowded.
- It ain't over till it's over
- When you come to a fork in the road, take it.
- When asked what time it was, he responded “Right now?”

# Yogi isms

- Thank you for making this day necessary.
- It's déjà vu all over again.
- You can observe a lot by watching.
- Always go to other people's funerals; otherwise they won't go to yours.
- A nickel ain't worth a dime anymore



# Yogi isms

- You better cut the pizza in four pieces because I'm not hungry enough to eat six
- If you don't know where you're going, you might end up somewhere else
- Little League is a good thing because it keeps parents off the streets
- I knew the record would stand until it was broken
- The future ain't what it used to be

# Yogi isms

- It ain't the heat, it's the humility
- Pair up in threes
- We made too many wrong mistakes
- It gets late early out there
- If people don't want to come out to the ballpark, nobody's going to stop them

# Yogi isms

- Never answer an anonymous letter
- We have deep depth
- Why buy good luggage – you only use it when you travel
- (After seeing streakers on the field) I don't know if they were men or women – they had bags over their heads

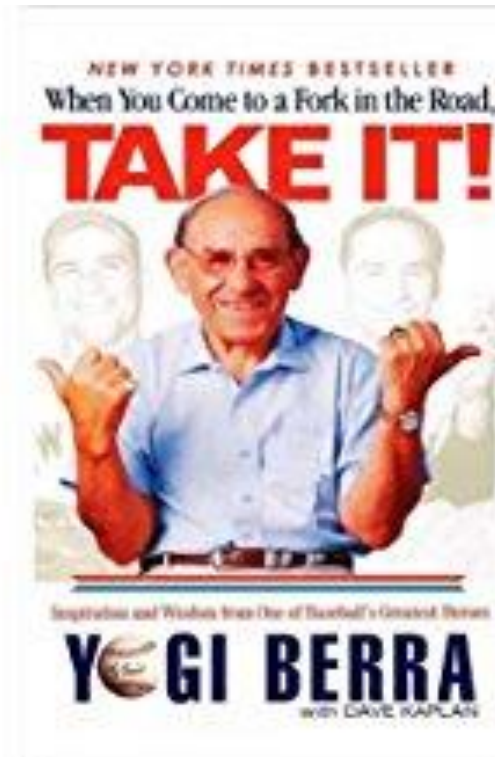
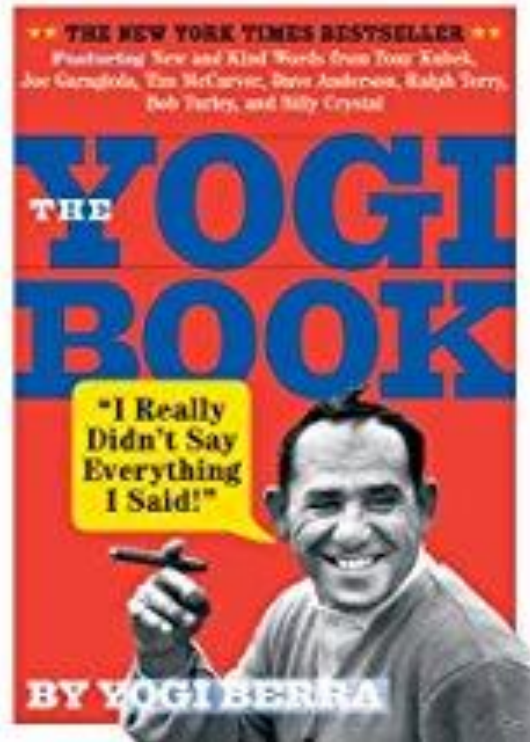
# Yogi isms

- When informed that the mayor of Dublin Ireland was Jewish: “Only in America.”
- If you can’t imitate him, don’t copy him.
- When told by wife Carmen she took their sons to see *Doctor Zhivago* “What’s wrong with them now?”

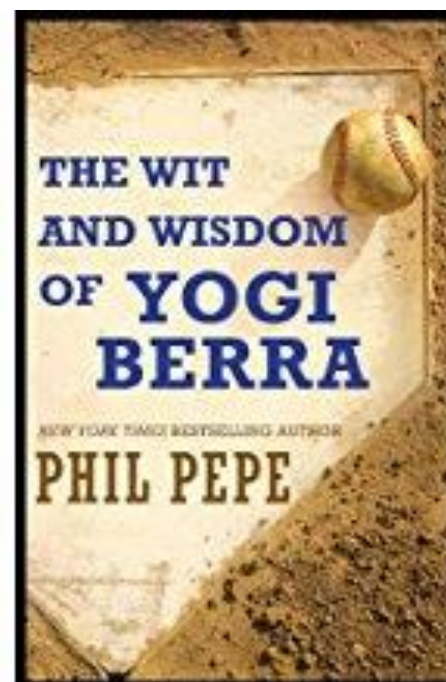
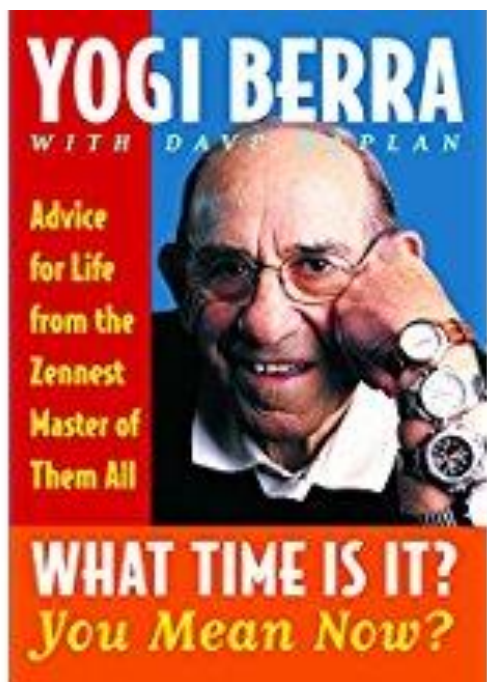
# Yogi isms

- Carmen asked Yogi where he wanted to be buried, in St. Louis, New York or Montclair Yogi's response : "I don't know. Why don't you surprise me?"
- I really didn't say everything I said.

# Yogi isms turned into books



# Yogi isms turned into books



# Yogi in Commercials

- First, two vintage ones

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LMwEl\\_L65u8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LMwEl_L65u8)

- Bonus question – who supplies the voice of the cat?



# Yogi in Commercials

- One from 1987

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NvEC1qZuehl>

- Who's at the bar right behind Yogi?

# Yogi in Commercials

- Some recent ones – 21<sup>st</sup> century Yogi

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mMQiKT4B6o4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VS83HdpzxDU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8PkiFlMiyGQ>