WAIT TILL NEXT YEAR: A Memoir by Doris Kearns Goodwin

Reviewed by Skip McAfee
5533 Colts Foot Court, Columbia, MD 21045

Wait Till Next Year. I couldn't wait. I finished this delightful memoir on Christmas day. And if you're of similar vintage (growing up in the New York City area during the late 40s and early 50s), there is much in this little book to identify with, whether you're an imperialist Yankee fan, a country-club Giant fan (as I was), or a blue-collar Dodger fan (as Goodwin was).

Although not truly a baseball book, per se, Wait Till Next Year is a gentle, humorous, graceful vision of an era and suburban Long Island town in which baseball was an undercurrent theme interwoven among the pleasures and problems that life brings.

Goodwin looks back on a childhood enriched by "the holy trinity" of her father (who introduced baseball to her), Catholicism (and wondering if praying that bad things befall Alvin Dark and Sal Maglie is sinful), and the Brooklyn Dodgers. The memoir is an indelible portrait of a young woman who learns to watch and care about the world around her. And throughout, the world of Ebbets Field is never far away. The seasonal imperatives of baseball, combined with the great religious festivals of the Catholic church, produce "a passionate love of history, ceremony and ritual".

The seemingly innocent era is recalled as one characterized by the terror of polio, A-bomb drills, the McCarthy hearings, the ugly face of racial prejudice, the death of James Dean, and Sputnik. Also, Gil Hodges' batting slumps, Jackie integrating the grand old game, Campy's accident, the shot heard 'round the world ("the worst day of my life as a fan"), and the annual heartbreaks of Dodger losses until 1955.

Although I am male, non-Catholic, Westchester-born, five years older than Goodwin, and a long-time Giants fan, I found myself pleasantly reliving much of my childhood as Goodwin related places and incidents that resonated with my own: Jones Beach, "Stinky" Stanky, walking to school, burning leaves at curbside, You Are There, St. Christopher medals, washing your hands to fend off polio, impatience when the other team was at bat, parents unwinding with Manhattans before supper, Ping-Pong in the basement, Rockettes at Christmas time, riding bikes everywhere, autograph books, "Sh-Boom!", the "impossibly green grass" of a major league ballpark, and mothers obsessed with cleanliness. What a way to reexamine one's childhood!

I highly recommend this book, written by the most genuine of the "talking heads" in Ken Burns' error-filled epic.