

Beantown's BEST

From Sox to Celtics, Bob's got Boston covered.

According to Bob Ryan '64, *The Best of Bob Ryan* contains false advertising. Out of the 44 *Boston Globe* columns contained within the new ebook, Ryan feels that only about 20 of them rank as "the best." Or maybe 15. Not that he's complaining. And not that it matters all that much, anyway. As fellow *Globe* scribe Dan Shaughnessy, who wrote the foreword, points out, a book titled "*The Worst of Ryan* would have been better than *The Best of the Rest of Us*."

You don't need to be a Boston fan – or even a sports fan – to grasp Shaughnessy's meaning. There is a playful, exciting, urgent momentum at work in Ryan's stories that can dazzle even if the reader might not be able to ID all the athletes. Ryan is more than capable of bringing the uninitiated up to speed. When, for example, he observes that Boston Celtic Robert Parrish has "established a bad case of the oopsies," what else, really, does one need to know?

What's doubly remarkable is that Ryan throughout his 44-year history at the *Globe* banged out most of this prose with little time to dither over a turn of phrase. Much of what's in *The Best of Bob Ryan* is what the author describes as "good old-fashioned deadline pieces."

"A Celtics game might start at 7:00 and

end at 9:00," Ryan explains, using the same breezy, rat-a-tat information delivery system that can be found in his columns. "In the old days, you're doing a running story during the game. At the end of the first half you're laying down about 40 typewritten lines, another graph or two by the end of the third quarter, and, depending on how the fourth quarter goes, another graph or two. And then a lede. That's the first edition story. Then you go to the locker room and the clock is on. The next edition deadline would be 11:30. I hated the second edition. By the time you come back from the locker room and you sit down to compose, you're looking at about an hour or an hour and ten to write. And if the game goes into over-

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time, you have even less time. What you were always praying for – always – was a rout, because when you have a rout you can start writing before the game is over. Just plug stuff in. Just plug it in."

A stressful job to be sure, but although Ryan was busy taking notes, composing copy, and providing historical context, he was never too busy to not enjoy the game. In Ryan's columns his fandom always shines through.

A Trenton native, Ryan's passion for sports – and sports writing – has been a part of who he is for as long as he can remember. "When I was a kid, my father would take me to a Trenton Catholic game on a Friday night," he says. "But I never felt the game had been validated until I read about it the next day."

So did Ryan write for *The Lawrence*?

"Did I write for *The Lawrence*?" Ryan sputters in response, his tone suggesting that a stupider question has never been asked by anyone, anywhere. "I worked for *The Lawrence* for three years! I have my back copies from '62 to '63 and '63 to '64! I was the sports editor, and I was voted 'Done Most for *The Lawrence*!' *The Lawrence* was essential. That was a crucial point for me. I was devoted to *The Lawrence*. All those Wednesday and Saturday nights! Oh, my



God! Absolutely!"

From Lawrenceville, he went to Boston College, where upon graduation he nabbed a spot on the *Globe's* sports beat, where his distinctive writing style soon earned him a legion of loyal readers.

"When you write, you must be true to your personality," Ryan says. "There are some very good writers who are remarkably detached. They truly don't care who wins or loses. They just care about the story. That's fine for them, but that doesn't work for me. I am a fan, first and foremost. But being a fan doesn't mean you can't be critical."

The book provides ample evidence of this. When Patriots Coach Bill Belichick was caught taping opposing teams' defensive signals, for example, Ryan used his bully pulpit to vivisect him.

In another column, Ryan pokes fun at the unique narcissism of Red Sox fans. "When the ball went through [Red Sox first baseman] Bill Buckner's legs, the fans thought 'How could he do that to me? *To ME!*'" he says with a laugh. "That attitude is not unique to Boston, but is associated with Boston to a higher degree than anywhere else. Boston fans act as if nothing bad has ever happened to anybody else. And I always tell them, 'Why don't you move to Cleveland for a couple of years? Cleveland hasn't won any title in any major sport in 49 years. Not since the 1964 Browns. The Indians haven't won since 1948, the Cavaliers have never won, and they don't have a hockey team. Oh, and they love football more than you.'"

So *The Best of Bob Ryan* has a little of everything. Basketball, baseball, football, hockey, the Olympics, a smattering of tennis and boxing, and even a surprisingly perceptive take on the 1992 Oscar contenders.

And so what if Ryan might not find it all to be his best? It's still going to be some of the best writing you could ever add to your Kindle.