



COLIN KAEPERNICK PHOTO BY BROOK WARD/FICKR, CC BY-NC 2.0; SAMANTHA BEE PHOTO BY NEIL GRABOWSKY/MONTCLAIR FILM/FICKR, CC BY 2.0

From left: Clay Dalrymple was catcher for the Philadelphia Phillies during their 1964 season. Colin Kaepernick instigated social-justice protests during the national anthem at NFL games. Comedian Samantha Bee is among late-night talk show hosts who have been vocal against President Donald Trump.

Where sports, comedy and politics intersect

BY DEVON POUNCEY
STAFF WRITER

The Philadelphia Eagles' victory in the Super Bowl was a euphoric milestone in the lives of Philly sports fans. But no matter how sweet that smell of victory is for the sports-loving city, it doesn't wash away that terrible September more than 50 years ago when their beloved Phillies – seemingly destined for the World Series – took an epic nosedive.

That catastrophic failure sets the stage for Carl Wolfson's memoir, "Slide!: The Baseball Tragicomedy that Defined Me, My Family and the City of Philadelphia – And How It All Could've Been Avoided Had Someone Just Listened to My Lesbian Great Aunt."

Comedian, radio host, author and activist Wolfson has never been shy about expressing his views, and the charged atmosphere of fandom seems the perfect backdrop – as much then as now.

Sports have always provided a common place for people of different backgrounds to express their political views. It's a place where athletes, franchise executives and fans have a platform.

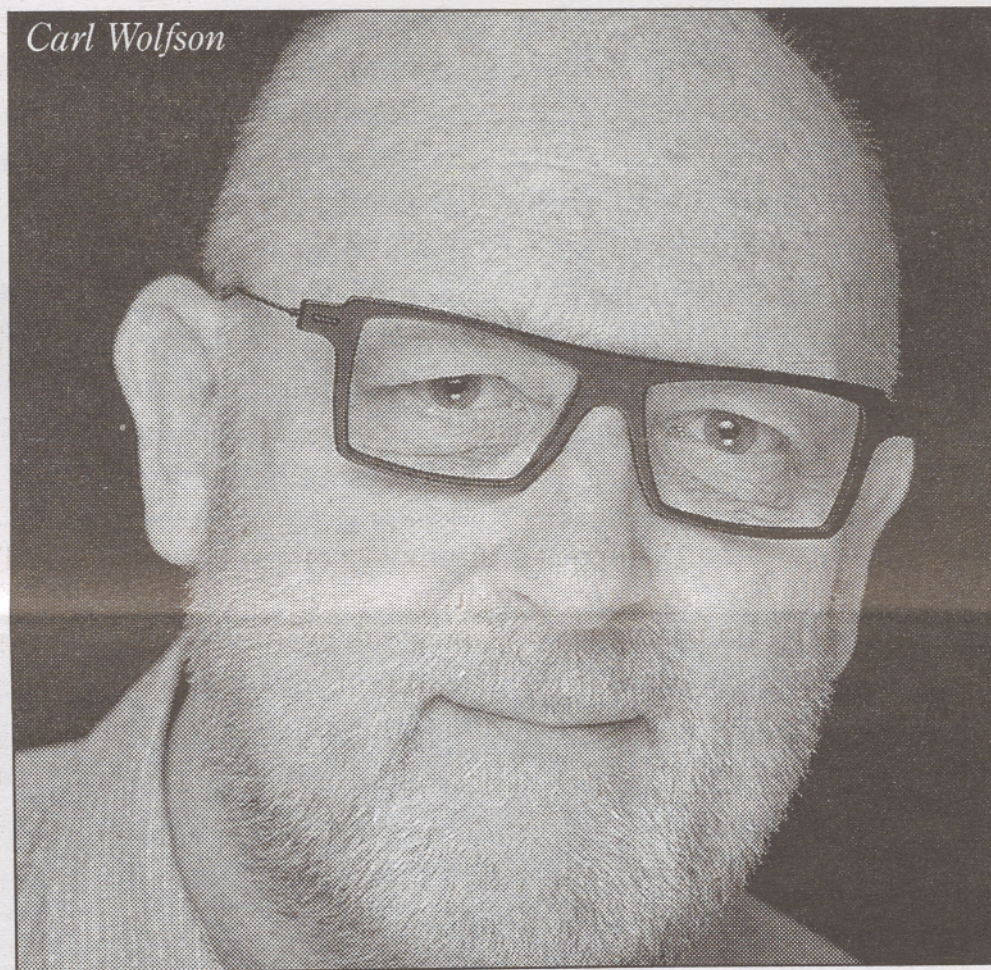
Jackie Robinson, Muhammad Ali and Jackie Joyner-Kersey are a few who used their platforms to promote social progress. Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban once tweeted, "What has Donald Trump done to help struggling people pay their bills? Serious question. I would appreciate your thoughts." And with protests during the national anthem recently reaching mainstream-media heights in the NFL, many executives have been outspoken about their political views.

Wolfson spoke with Street Roots about his new book, activism in sports and comedy's role in politics.

DeVon Pouncey: What do you want readers to take away from your book?

Carl Wolfson: It's threefold, really. Sports fans, especially baseball fans, ought to love it because it covers the Phillies' collapse in 1964, which is still the greatest collapse in Major League history. The real organic part of the book is the story of my coming of age and discovering comedy during that time. The third part of the book, which I think readers will relate to, is the 1960s, living through the Cuban missile crisis, the assassination of President

Carl Wolfson



COURTESY PHOTO

Carl Wolfson explores American society and his own coming of age through the lens of the Phillies' 1964 collapse

Kennedy and all of the big issues of the day.

In those three areas, the baseball story – which is pretty amazing and included the first perfect game pitched (in the National League) since the 1880s, by Phillies pitcher Jim Bunning, and there is a lot of drama in there – my coming of age with my crazy family members, and the period of the 1960s, I think readers will relate to those three things or at least find them interesting.

D.P.: You mentioned some of the mainstream political happenings during the 1960s. How did those affect your love for the game of baseball?

C.W.: One of the ways that it formed me was that the 1964 Phillies were the first fully integrated team in franchise history, and not just African-American players but Hispanic players, too. I'm a kid at 11 years old, and to me they were my heroes because they were the Phillies, and me and my family didn't think in terms of black, white and Hispanic. During this time, there were urban riots, including in Philadelphia, but

when I would read the sports page, I didn't think about the differences between people that others were exploiting; I was thinking of them as my heroes, as players, and that's what was important to me.

One of the characters in the book – which was my grandma, who was very conservative – made the comment that if God had wanted black and white people to interact, he would've made them the same color. That was a shocking statement to me, and it didn't compute with me because I just loved my Phillies.

D.P.: You called this book a tragicomedy. Why was comedy so important during a tragic time in your life?

C.W.: That season for the Phillies in 1964 after my family and I just moved to Philadelphia was the first year I followed baseball. That year was so magnificent for the Phillies because they were unexpected leaders in the National League, and then when they hit this 10-game losing streak, I was trying to help my family and deal with it, and I discovered comedy to make

everybody laugh.

It was a hard thing for the city of Philadelphia to go through. The World Series tickets had already been printed. We expected to win easily, and then when the slide happened, it affected the city of Philadelphia for decades and decades after. I found that if the Phillies weren't going to win the pennant, I at least found some comedy in the members in my family and the Phillies announcers, which kind of got me through it all. In life, comedy is one of the things that gets you through hard times, and I'd discovered it.

D.P.: With so much political turmoil in American society today, what role does comedy play in comparison to the 1960s?

C.W.: It's huge right now. It's comedians like Trevor Noah, Stephen Colbert, Samantha Bee and Jimmy Kimmel who are leading the opposition to Trump. I did stand-up comedy from 1980 until I moved to Portland in the 2000s to do radio, and I'm very proud that the comedians are leading the resistance against Trump. It's not just jokes that they're telling. All jokes have an underlying truth to them, and when you unmask Trump or any object of the joke, you're getting to the truth of something. When you do that in joke form, people remember it more than if somebody just tells you something.

D.P.: Do you think there is an issue with comedy desensitizing our reality when it comes to who is in office?

C.W.: That's a great question. There are a lot of ways that Trump gets normalized, and to some extent, if you normalize him, that's a very dangerous path to go down because then his behavior in office becomes accepted, and that could be possible with comedy.

I see no other alternative to pushing back and being able to unmask him as a fraud, joke or someone unfit for office. I understand that there is the danger of normalization, but you can't stifle the resistance, whether it's in organization, speech or in comedy. In the end, you have to hope that enough people see the truth behind the joke.

D.P.: You wrote the book from the perspective of an 11-year-old baseball fan. With

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