



Holy Toledo: Lessons From Bill King, Renaissance Man of the Mic

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Bill King, longtime voice of the A's, Warriors and Raiders, was a beloved figure in California for decades, celebrated for his passion and precision in calling a game and for his colorful life away from sports, an utterly original figure who lives today in the hearts and memories of countless fans touched by his greatness. Bill was also one of the most influential broadcasters of all time, an inspiration to legions of his fellow broadcasters who looked up to him. No less an authority than John Madden tells Ken Korach in this 80,000-word testament to Bill's uniqueness that when he turned from coaching to broadcasting, no one was more of an influence on him than Bill. But this was true of Bill the man as well, not merely Bill the broadcaster. "We all wanted to live vicariously through Bill. The things that he did, we wished we could do," Madden tells Ken Korach.

Korach, longtime voice of the A's and Bill's partner for ten seasons until King's death in 2005, is the perfect one to bring Bill to life on the page. A half-century ago, Ken Korach was a kid in Los Angeles, spinning the night dial to tune in Warriors basketball games from faraway San Francisco for one reason: He just had to hear Bill. Now, in Holy Toledo – Lessons from Bill King, Renaissance Man of the Mic, he tells the remarkable story of King the legendary baseball, basketball and football broadcaster. Bill was a student of Russian literature, a passionate sailor, a fan of eating anything and everything from gourmet to onions and peanut butter, a remarkable painter. Korach draws on a lifetime of listening to and learning from King – as well as extensive research, including more than fifty interviews with King's family members, colleagues, friends and associates – to create this rich portrait, eagerly awaited by thousands of fans who have flocked to the Holy Toledo Facebook page and heard about the book through Ken's media appearances.

Holy Toledo features a moving foreword by Hall of Fame broadcaster Jon Miller, previously of ESPN, and a brilliant cover by Mark Ulriksen, internationally recognized for his New Yorker magazine covers, that captures King's flair and personality.

Billy Beane

"The best part about Bill wasn't just that he was so good at his job but that he was so interesting outside of his job. His mustache epitomized that. He looked eccentric and he was eccentric, in a good way."

Bob Welch

"If I had a hitter I had trouble with, I'd ask Bill how I should pitch him. He always had a good answer."

Greg Papa

"Bill King was the greatest radio broadcaster in the history of the United States."

Tom Meschery

"Talking with Bill was like talking with an encyclopedia.... If you wanted to talk sports, literature – when Bill talked you listened, because he always had something interesting to talk about."

Al Attles

"He didn't sugarcoat it. Bill was a departure from the way it was. If a player from the Warriors made a mistake, Bill told it like it was."

Ed Rush

“I’d put the radio out the window and keep turning it to certain angles and it would go in and go out. I’d listen to the Warriors and the Raiders. To do all three sports like he did, he was phenomenal. He was out of this world.”

Tom Flores

“Bill made some of the great plays in the history of the Raiders even greater with his description. Those moments were kept alive in his voice.”

Jason Giambi

“He was such an incredible man. I had so much fun with him and he would always ask how my family was doing and I have the fondest memories of him. We would talk about life and all the things he had seen. He made me well rounded.”

Rick Barry

“He had the ability to see a game, a basketball game, and express what was happening in eloquent terms, at times instantaneously. When he was saying something, it was happening.”

Holy Toledo: Lessons From Bill King, Renaissance Man of the Mic Details

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From Reader Review Holy Toledo: Lessons From Bill King, Renaissance Man of the Mic for online ebook

Samuel Lam says

When I was informed about this book project on Kickstarter several months ago, I knew I had to get involved somehow. I grew up listening to Bill as a young kid just starting to get my feet wet with the Oakland A's as a fan. Since I never listened to him as a Warriors or Raiders broadcasters, the A's were what I associated him with. Over the years I would hear his work before my time and I am so amazed at how enjoyable he was with all three teams.

Because he was part of my upbringing and fandom as a baseball fan, I was so proud to be a part of this book and help share it with everyone. It's a great story of his life, his love of food and sports and the impact he had on so many people. I never met him but I felt that I knew him so well just by reading this. I miss listening to his calls on the radio.

This is a great book for anyone who grew up with Bay Area sports over the past half century. Bill was right in the middle of it. Reading this book was like dancing on a cruise ship. It felt like it would never end. Time stood still.

I do miss Bill King. This book takes me back to my youth listening to him on my dad's small radio in our house. I will never forget those moments. I'm so glad Bill was there with me.

yh says

When I first started getting into baseball, I followed the games on the radio. At the time, I had the capacity to watch the games on TV, but found it difficult to sit down for three hours in front of it. Instead, I would put the game on using MLB Gameday Audio, relying on the voices of Ken Korach and Vince Cotroneo to guide me through the games. I loved this experience; they were great at what they did, and their calls of the exciting moments made the moments themselves even more exciting. Radio is still my favorite way to catch a baseball game, and I think my ideal day at the ballpark would certainly involve keeping score and listening to Ken and Vince.

I was unfortunately neither a sports fan nor in the Bay Area when Bill King was still with us, so I completely missed out on his work. However, all of the A's beat writers would bring him up often, particularly during Hall of Fame season when they would express their disappointment at the Hall denying him the Frink Award, the award honoring achievement in baseball broadcasting. It never occurred to me to look up any of his calls, however; how great could they be? Eventually, I decided to sate my curiosity, honor a Bay Area sports legend, and learn some history by reading this book, a biography of King written by the aforementioned Ken Korach. Given how much I loved listening to baseball on the radio, I thought this would be a good way to learn more about someone

Something that is immediately apparent about this book is how much respect its author has for its subject. Korach takes great care to paint an enthusiastic yet reverent picture of Bill King, whether he is talking about his actual broadcasting work or unrelated facts about his life. It's clear that this was a labor of love for Korach: a way to memorialize his partner and friend, while sharing a multitude of amusing anecdotes about him culled from countless sources, including such luminaries as John Madden, Billy Beane, and Lon Simmons (who, to be fair, I also know very little about).

Much of the book consists of quotations from interviews with people who knew King; there are very few statements made without some sort of story or outside opinion to back them up. Korach goes so far as to shift to the first person later in the book when sharing his own stories, effectively making himself just another interviewee at times. These stylistic choices make the book feel a lot like a documentary, as bits and pieces of King's life story are intertwined with quotes and stories from outside sources. This gives the whole book a great sense of forward motion, but also makes the book feel somewhat one-note. Korach's writing is, as I said, not detached by any means, so there really isn't a sense of objectivity anywhere to be found.

The best feature of this book is that it has many of King's calls transcribed in full, scattered throughout the text. For those who remember these moments, I'm sure the calls will bring back great memories, and for those that didn't, they provide a useful way to not only analyze the language of the calls (as King's command of the English language is praised a great deal), but to look them up. After finishing the book, I looked up his call of the Holy Roller (as it got such high praise in the book), and it really was very exciting. I definitely got goosebumps, even though I hate the Raiders.

However, this book couldn't overcome the hurdle of making something that can only be experienced through sound come alive. I still haven't ever listened to a full game called by King, and I'm not sure I ever will. So much of what makes sports special is that they happen all the time. There are certainly amazing, spectacular, indelible moments, but a lot of it is that it's a constant force. Not every game will be terrifically exciting, but you always know there will be a game tomorrow, or next week, or next year. Sports broadcasters are the same way: they're always there, calling the action, filling time, and acting as companions through the countless shared chunks of time. The personality and unfailing enthusiasm that shone through in every broadcast was what made Bill King so inspirational to so many people, and that is something I'm not sure you can capture in a book.

This book wasn't for me, I realize now. The people who should read this are the people who know what Korach and his countless interviewees are talking about when they bring up King's attention to detail or way with words, because for someone who has no emotional connection to King, they just seem like compliments that could be given to any number of broadcasters, including Korach himself, who I think is fantastic in his own right. I certainly don't dispute King's greatness—I would be a fool to do so when so many people have been touched by his work. However, maybe the best I can hope for is that a broadcaster who was influenced by King will be as big a part of my leisure life as King was to Bay Area residents for so long. I wish I had been around to hear Bill King, or that I had grown up with sports as a bigger part of my life so that I could understand what made King so great, but I missed those opportunities, and with them, the chance for a real emotional connection to this book as well.

Danny Knobler says

No one better than Ken Korach to explain who Bill King was, what he meant and how he became a Bay Area and broadcasting legend. Great stuff.

Steve Kettmann says

Ken Korach does a wonderful job of bringing Bill to life in the pages of his book.

Patrick says

Let me say this first, with apologies to Ken Korach, this is not a very well written book. Korach style is meandering and often non-sequiter. There are times when even he seems lost in his own stream of consciousness. But, if you grew up like I did listening to Bill King, then the stylistic flaws do nothing to diminish this book. Korach's book does the one thing it needed to do right: it brings the too soon gone Bill King back to life. To me, the story of baseball is narrated in Bill King's voice, and this book reminded me why I so firmly believe that.

Kevin August says

Felt like I was reading about my grandpa. If you grew up a sports fan in the Bay Area anytime after the Kennedy Administration, you'll breeze through it in a few days. And you'll probably shed a tear or two. Nostalgia is a wonderful thing.

Randal says

A touching, personal portrait of the late, great Bill King from someone who knew him best. Now we just need to get Bill into the Hall of Fame. Let's go, Oakland!

Andrew says

I'm a little biased because I helped to back this kickstarter project, but the book is excellent. If you have ever listened to the late Bill King or followed the teams he broadcast for, then you must read this book. Mr. Korach paints a picture of deep respect to his former broadcast partner, the many stories and anecdotes are insights not only into Bill King the broadcaster, but Bill King the person. It's a crime he's not already in the hall of fame, of any of the three sports he broadcast, but perhaps this book will help Mr. King get the accolade he deserves.

Tori says

I grew up a Giants fan in the Bay Area, and grew into an even bigger A's fan. When I saw this book mentioned during an A's broadcast this summer, I knew I HAD to read it. And what a treat it was! Ken Korach did a wonderful job paying tribute to King. I remember hearing Bill King many times, with his signature "Holy Toledo" for really special occasions. Listening to baseball games on a transistor radio = that was the epitome of a great summer!

I hadn't realized how much of a "Renaissance" man King was. He never went to college, but learned about a variety of subjects (Russian, opera...) because of his particular interest in those areas. As Korach said, King never tried to fit into someone else's mold. He lived a full life vibrantly, and loved what he did. And a lot of people feel very fortunate to have known him. what a tribute!

Pauline says

Holy Toledo! I'm ready for the 2014 baseball season! This book is a must-read, not only for all A's fans, but for baseball fans (and sports fans in general). Ken Korach made me smile, laugh, reminisce, and tear up. I had goose bumps reliving some of the old calls and hearing the old names. I had to go to my kitchen and get bottle opener to hear Bill's 20 game winning call. Bill King, I sure miss you! You were one of a kind and a true "renaissance man of the mic". I learned a lot and loved the walk down memory lane. Thanks, Ken Korach, for sharing your memories of the Great One with us. (and...Let's Go Oak-land!!!)

p.s. Ken, if you read this, will you sign my book this season?

Paul Mainard says

As a life-long fan of Bay Area sports, I can say that Bill King was as well loved in Oakland as Ernie Harwell or Mel Allen. He brought life and color to all of the sports he covered. Now Ken Korach brings Bill's life and color to those of us who only knew him through the radio. This is a tremendous gift to us fans as it ensures that Bill's legacy will live on and be celebrated.

Leon Mayeri says

Bay Area sports fans have been profoundly influenced by the lucid descriptions provided by Bill King over the years. His excitement for baseball, basketball, and football made many lifelong fans and his legacy will endure forever, thanks to this great biography from a fellow announcer, Ken Korach.

Rob Gouveia says

What a wonderful guy! I'm very sorry that he's gone.

Elizabeth Webber says

I won this book through a Goodreads giveaway and am so glad I did! Harry Caray has most of my heart but he is moving over a little for King after I read this book. It is well written and organized. The pictures and references to many people everyone knows made this a very engaging book. I used to love listening to baseball on the radio with my dad and look forward to recommending this book to him.

Terry Miller says

If you are a Bay Area sports fan you will love this book. Bill King was a brilliant man and knew how to paint

a picture with words and convey the excitement of the moment. I loved this book.
