Willie Randolph grew up in Brownsville, Brooklyn. As a kid, he played baseball in Betsy Head Playground, a 10-acre park full of broken bottles, garbage, and syringes. “The Jackie Robinson Story,” the first book Randolph read, reinforced his determination to make it to the major leagues.

Signed by the Pittsburgh Pirates, Randolph was traded to the New York Yankees in 1975. He wore the pinstripes for almost 30 years as an All-Star second baseman and coach. From 2005-2007, he was the manager of the New York Mets.

In “The Yankee Way,” Randolph reflects on his career, the men he played with and against, and changes to the game, including the impact of free agency, performance enhancing drugs, and the QuesTec measurement of umpires’ ball and strike calls.

A baseball traditionalist, Randolph is capable of considerable candor but, perhaps because he wants to manage again someday, he seems at times to keep his views – and the bitterness he denies he feels – in check.

On Clemens, Martinez

“The Yankee Way” is at its best when Randolph takes readers inside the clubhouse.

He accepts the practice of pitchers throwing at batters to intimidate them as part of the game, for example, but explains how difficult it was for him and his teammates to “forget all the years” of Roger Clemens “dusting guys” like Derek Jeter when Clemens was traded from the Toronto Blue Jays to the Yankees.

And when the Mets signed Pedro Martinez, an “assassin” on the mound, who “will cut out your heart to win,” Randolph, who had had his share of run-ins with the right hander, had to be reassured that their shared past was a non-issue.

Underpaid, undervalued

Although he professes to hold no ill will toward owners, Randolph claims...
that he was underpaid for most of his career. He blames himself for naiveté, not fully recognizing his value, and not negotiating hard enough to get what he deserved.

That said, he indicates that the collusion of owners to limit player movement and keep salaries down in the 1980s was “definitely not my fault.”

And, although he does not “want to get into all the aspects of it” and “didn’t want to see a strike go forward” in 1994, Randolph “believed that the players were in the right.”

Reticent on race
Randolph also does not get into all aspects of race in baseball. To be sure, he characterizes scouts as “White men with their sun visors and clipboards and beach chairs who could make my dream happen,” most of whom didn’t come to Brownsville to look for big league prospects.

He celebrates several African-American mentors, especially Willie Stargell, who taught him “some good and powerful lessons.” And he evinces pride in Martin Luther King, Barack Obama, African-American culture, Negro League players, and his selection as the first major league manager of color in New York City.

He seems reticent, however, to engage larger issues, including the role of race in the appointment of Blacks as managers or to front office positions.

Ready to return
Randolph wasn’t happy, of course, when Mets General Manager Omar Maniya fired him in 2008.

Convinced that he has the knowledge, experience and passion to lead a team to a pennant and a World Series, he hopes he will get another shot at managing.

Until he gets “another chance to give back to the game and the community,” he implies he is content to select his All-Willie team, enjoy his wife and four children, and remind himself that baseball, religious faith, and hard work gave him a chance to get out of his neighborhood, go places, and do the things he had dreamt about.

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