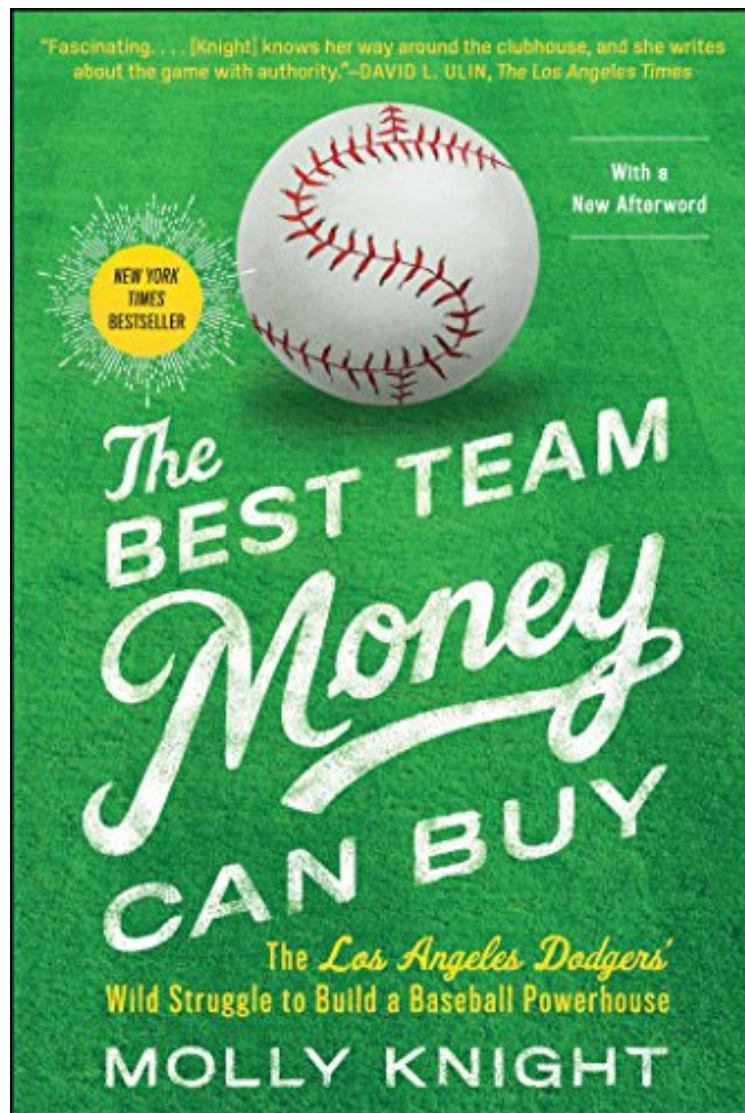


[Pdf free] The Best Team Money Can Buy: The Los Angeles Dodgers' Wild Struggle to Build a Baseball Powerhouse

The Best Team Money Can Buy: The Los Angeles Dodgers' Wild Struggle to Build a Baseball Powerhouse

Molly Knight

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Molly Knight : The Best Team Money Can Buy: The Los Angeles Dodgers' Wild Struggle to Build a Baseball Powerhouse before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Best Team Money Can Buy: The Los Angeles Dodgers' Wild Struggle to Build a Baseball Powerhouse:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. For Dodger fans...or haters....only.By AmazinThe first 50 pages or so are a fascinating and insightful look into the McCourt ownership debacle (and divorce) and how the new owners bet

the ranch on buying the team. After that, with the exception of Clayton Kershaw and Don Mattingly, it's simply a soap opera of overpaid prima donnas. Many years ago Sparky Lyle wrote a book about the 1978 NY Yankees entitled "The Bronx Zoo". It was a far more entertaining behind the scenes look because the players (Reggie Jackson, Ron Guidry, Goose Gossage, Lyle), manager (Billy Martin) and owner (Steinbrenner) were all bigger than life characters. The Dodger players are not bigger than life characters except in their own minds. If you are a passionate Dodger lover or hater you might enjoy this behind the scenes look. If you are neither of those, borrow a copy and read the first 50 or so pages. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Phenomenal book, hard to put down. By P. Quadrino I was shocked at how absorbing this book was to read. Often I couldn't put it down. I didn't expect a book about the most recent iterations of the LA Dodgers to be quite this interesting, but what a beautiful mess that team is. Such an eclectic and discordant mix of talent, wealth, entitlement, immaturity, and insecurity. Year after year, statistical projections predict the Dodgers to be at the very top of the league and then each season unfolds into a melodramatic roller coaster ride for them. Molly Knight's book provides all the most intimate details of these adventures. Starting off with the story of the transition of the LA Dodgers franchise from bankrupt pathetic embarrassment under crook owner Frank McCourt to the financially flourishing Guggenheim ownership regime with lots of behind-the-scenes details, the book (paperback version) covers the period of 2012 to 2015 focusing on the human side of the game without ever drifting into the territory of hero worship or platitudes or cliches. Just lots and lots of fascinating, entertaining stories about very proud and powerful personalities trying to coexist. Knight certainly knows baseball and when she does discuss the play on the field or statistical performance, she handles it adeptly. But the heart of this book is its human stories---the peculiarity of pitcher Zack Greinke, the pouty star outfielder Matt Kemp, paranoid middle man manager Don Mattingly, the loose cannon polarizing rule-breaker Yasiel Puig, the focused and determined superstar Clayton Kershaw, and so much more. The style sometimes reminded me of Dan Okrent's classic book "Nine Innings" in which the description of a single ballgame sets off lengthy tangents detailing the history of this or that player, all the events of their career that led them to that point. My only complaint (a minor one) is that things seem to fade toward the end, as though she wasn't sure how to conclude this great book. I was really hoping for super in-depth detail and discussion of the organization assembling what Knight calls "The Best Front Office Money Can Buy" but felt that section was a little too truncated. That powerhouse front office, an All Star team of former GMs and sought-after execs, is (I think) the most fascinating thing about the current Dodgers and I hoped for more stories about how that all came about and how they managed to function. Was shocked to see Knight mention a few times that the team had missed out on a trade or a signing because the front office was too focused on some other matter. Sounds like exactly what this braintrust was built to avoid and completely contradicting the stories that were coming out during the 2014-15 winter meetings when all the ex-GMs in the front office were wheeling and dealing separately, divide-and-conquer style. But I guess all of that is a story for another book. 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. If you lived through the years there's nothing new. By Jeanine (AKA Blue 643) Was kind of disappointed in this book, as a season ticket holder. There was really not much else in it other than her being there when Kershaw signed his contract that we didn't know already. But for those not knowledgeable about the Dodgers it is a good read.

With a new Afterword covering the 2015 season. The bestselling, inside-the-clubhouse story of two tumultuous years when the Los Angeles Dodgers were re-made from top to bottom, becoming the most talked-about and most colorful team in baseball. "It's as if Molly Knight ushers you behind the closed clubhouse doors." (Buster Olney, ESPN) In 2012 the Los Angeles Dodgers were bought out of bankruptcy in the most expensive sale in sports history. Los Angeles icon Magic Johnson and his partners hoped to put together a team worthy of Hollywood: consistently entertaining. By most accounts they have succeeded, if not always in the way they might have imagined. In *The Best Team Money Can Buy*, Molly Knight tells the story of the Dodgers' 2013 and 2014 seasons with detailed, previously unreported revelations. She shares a behind-the-scenes account of the astonishing sale of the Dodgers, as well as what the Dodgers actually knew in advance about rookie phenom and Cuban defector Yasiel Puig. We learn how close manager Don Mattingly was to losing his job during the 2013 season—and how the team turned around the season in the most remarkable fifty-game stretch of any team since World War II. Knight also provides a rare glimpse into the in-fighting and mistrust that derailed the team in 2014 and paints an intimate portrait of star pitcher Clayton Kershaw, including details about the record contract offer he turned down before accepting the richest contract any pitcher ever signed. Exciting, surprising, and filled with juicy details, "a must-read for fans of the Dodgers and all Los Angeles sports teams." Knight's "undercover work is like none other" (Library Journal). *The Best Team Money Can Buy* is filled with "fascinating perspectives" (Los Angeles Times) and "interesting anecdotes about some of baseball's most compelling figures" (The Sacramento Bee).

"Entertaining . . . offers interesting anecdotes about some of baseball's most compelling figures, among them Clayton Kershaw, Zack Greinke, Don Mattingly and the enigmatic Yasiel Puig." (Ailene Voisin The Sacramento Bee) "From the outside looking in, the Dodgers have been a bubbling cauldron of personality, talent

and moods, with the occasional dollop of jealousy. In *The Best Team Money Can Buy*, it's as if Molly Knight ushers you behind the closed clubhouse doors to see it for yourself." (Buster Olney, ESPN) "Fascinating perspectives. . . [Knight] knows her way around the clubhouse, and she writes about the game with authority." (David L. Ulin *The Los Angeles Times*) "With unprecedented access, Knight brings readers inside the clubhouse and the front office as no other writer has with any team, showing us a modern-day soap opera playing out at 60 feet 6 inches." (Keith Law, Analyst for ESPN's "Baseball Tonight") "A well-written book that offers a nuanced look into the dynamics of a big league clubhouse. . . . A must-read." (Brendan Gawlowski *Baseball Prospectus*) "In *The Best Team Money Can Buy*, Molly Knight lifts the curtain on one of the premier franchises in sports, taking readers beyond the field and into the clubhouse, board rooms and homes of some of the most compelling athletes of this generation. It is a rocky path—but a rollicking ride—for a glamour team bankrolled by billionaire owners who lifted the team from bankruptcy and will try anything to win a championship. With keen observations culled from tireless reporting, Knight deftly paints an intimate, nuanced portrait of the people behind it all, bringing these characters to life as nobody has before." (Tyler Kepner, national baseball writer for *The New York Times*) "An entertaining chronicle of two Dodger seasons. . . . Knight supplies plenty of juicy clubhouse details." (Gene Maddaus *L.A. Weekly*) "For any self-respecting fan, putting this book down would be like trying to eat just one garlic fry. . . . An agile exploration of the Dodgers' vertiginous 2013 season. Knight had her notebook out for all of it." (Los Angeles Magazine) "Consistently absorbing. . . . Knight is a talented journalist, and there's enough tumult in these pages to hold the attention of even a casual fan." (Kevin Canfield *The San Francisco Chronicle*) "Knight delivers an elegant précis of a baseball team's season, and you don't have to be a Dodgers fan to enjoy it." (Kirkus) "A compelling, well-examined book that exemplifies what occurs behind the scenes. A must-read for fans of the Dodgers and all Los Angeles sports teams. Knight's undercover work is like none other." (Library Journal) About the Author Molly Knight wrote about baseball for ESPN the Magazine for eight seasons. Her work has also appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, *Glamour*, *SELF*, *Baseball Prospectus*, and *Variety*. A native of Los Angeles and lifelong Dodgers fan, she lives in LA. *The Best Team Money Can Buy* is her first book. Excerpt. copy; Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. *The Best Team Money Can Buy* PROLOGUE I didn't think Clayton Kershaw would lose. Though I'd spoken many times for this book during the Dodgers' crazy 2013 season, I waited until before Game 5 of the National League Championship Series—when his team was one loss away from elimination—to ask him if we could sit down for an extended interview about everything that had happened after the World Series was over. He agreed. The Dodgers won later that day to force the series back to St. Louis and keep their season alive. Kershaw had the ball for Game 6. And though Los Angeles trailed in the series three games to two and would have to beat a tough Cardinals team in hostile territory even to sniff a Game 7, everyone around the club assumed that with their ace on the mound victory was a foregone conclusion. After winning the National League's ERA crown the previous two seasons by posting numbers in the mid 2's, the twenty-five-year-old lefty had somehow made himself even tougher to hit. When he finished the 2013 regular season weeks earlier with a microscopic 1.83 earned run average, he erased any lingering questions that he was the best pitcher on the planet. There was no such thing as a sure win in baseball. But sending Clayton Kershaw to the mound in an elimination game was as close as it got. And then it all went sideways. Kershaw was torched for seven runs in four innings in a game that defied explanation. There would be no Game 7 after all. The Dodgers were out, having lost to the Cardinals by the same score as if they had forfeited: 9—0. Kershaw took it hard, showing no interest in appreciating his role in taking the Dodgers the closest they had been to a World Series berth in twenty-five years; he preferred to blame himself for their failure to get there because his wiring didn't allow him any other choice. Two weeks later, the Red Sox beat the Cardinals to become world champions. Two weeks after that Kershaw won the National League's Cy Young Award for the second time in three seasons. I wondered if he could ever enjoy a plaque he would gladly trade to get just one game back. I decided to wait a month to reach out about our sit-down, hoping to allow enough time for the sting of Game 6 to fade, even just a little. But then Thanksgiving rolled around, and in December he and his wife, Ellen, spent three weeks in Zambia to oversee the work their foundation did with orphans there. Christmas came and went and so did New Year's. With spring training approaching, I finally sent him a text message during the first week of January. Would he still be interested in getting together to talk for the book? Sounds great, he replied. And then he asked when I could come to Dallas, where he lives in the off-season. He told me he had to fly to Florida the following Monday, January 13, so we agreed that I'd come out from Los Angeles on Tuesday night and we'd meet on Wednesday. When I landed at Love Field I turned on my cell phone and cursed. Social media lit up with news that Kershaw was about to sign a record contract extension to remain in Los Angeles. I'd been in sports reporting long enough to know that if there were any truth to that rumor, the last thing I'd want to do was meet a journalist for lunch. As I thought about cutting my losses and hopping on the next flight home, my phone buzzed with a text message. It was Kershaw. "Why don't you come by our house around 3 tomorrow if that works?" he asked me. It did. The extension talk must have just been another false alarm in a season full of them. The Dodgers had made no secret of wanting to lock up their star starting pitcher in blue forever, but negotiations early in the season had gotten weird, and the two sides had been locked in a standstill for

months. When I arrived at Kershaw's house at three the following day, he apologized for my having to park a block away. He and Ellen had just purchased a home across the street from an elementary school, and he forgot that he told me to come around pickup time, when minivans and SUVs snarled his street. (The traffic added an extra minute to my trip.) I thought I'd find the Kershaw residence by scanning the block for the biggest stately pile, but the two-story colonial-style home that wound up being theirs was the same size as every other house that flanked it. He and Ellen had met at a school they attended just around the corner as eighth graders. I rang the doorbell. Kershaw opened the front door wearing a backward navy blue baseball cap, a brown T-shirt, black basketball shorts, and flip-flops. His playoff beard was long gone. His eyes looked bluer than the last time I saw him, too, after the final game of the Dodgers' season in St. Louis, when defeat bled into them and turned them reddish gray. The first thing I noticed when I stepped inside his house was the Ping-Pong table just to the left of the entryway. "I told Ellen she could get whatever furniture she wanted within reason if she just let me have my Ping-Pong table," he said. He showed me what Ellen had given him for Christmas: a tiny contraption that launched Ping-Pong balls toward him like a pitching machine so he didn't need a second person to play. "Who needs friends?" he said with a laugh. Then he grabbed a picture book of all his memorable moments from 2013 that Dodgers team photographer Jon SooHoo put together, another present from Ellen. The book ended as abruptly as the season had. Its last page showed snaps from his Division Series—clinching win over the Braves. There was no photographic evidence of the St. Louis series. We walked into the kitchen. He offered me a bottle of water and asked if I was hungry. A half dozen bananas and a vanilla-frosted Bundt cake sat on the counter undisturbed. Ellen had just left to run errands, so we were in the house alone. I told him that if he needed to kick me out so he could go sign a contract for half a billion dollars, he should feel free to do so. He laughed and shook his head. "Yeah," he said, tossing me a bottle of water and opening one for himself. "A lot of rumors, huh?" We sat down. Thirty seconds later his cell phone rattled against the kitchen table. He looked down at it and frowned. "Hmm, it's my agent," he said. "I actually do need to take this." He answered, without getting up from the table. Casey Close spoke from the other end of the line. "Congratulations. They met our terms," Close said. Kershaw scratched the top of his head with his right hand and smiled. Close told him that there was still some paperwork to sign, but that it was just a formality. After twelve months of negotiating, his mammoth contract extension was finally complete. "It's done, man," Close said. Kershaw nodded and thanked him. "It'll probably leak in the next twenty minutes," said Close. "But just wait until after the Dodgers announce it on Friday to comment." Kershaw thanked him again. The conversation lasted less than three minutes. Kershaw took a deep breath and hung up the phone. The room fell silent. I was now 100 percent certain he would ask me to leave. He didn't. "So," he said. "Where were we?" I was dumbfounded. "Don't you have, like, a million calls to make?" I asked. "Everyone who needs to know already knows," he said. Was there a bottle of whiskey he needed to open or a touchdown dance he needed to do? "Nah, it's good," he said. "Let's do the interview." He was serious. I laughed out loud. I first met Clayton Kershaw six years earlier when he was a wide-eyed nineteen-year-old rookie in big-league camp. I had spent the first three years of his career watching him make hitters much older than him look silly on television, and the last three trying to figure out how he did it in person. I'd committed the angles of his breaking pitches to memory, and heard teammates talk about how his freakish physical gifts were matched only by how hard he worked. I listened to him, time and again, as he stood in front of his locker after his starts and talked about whether his fastball was working that day or it wasn't, and how good his curveball felt as it left his fingertips. I talked to hitters who said his slider was invisible. I'd had a front-row seat to the truth but I missed it. At that moment I realized I was sitting across the table from a stone-cold assassin, a man so focused on completing the task in front of him, however mundane, that he didn't even postpone an interview to celebrate a phone call telling him he was \$200 million richer. Because he had, by choice, remained a bit of a mystery to the general public by keeping the press at a safe distance, once he made the decision to talk to me he was determined to knock it off his to-do list even though this news had given him an out. His astounding ability to focus and shut out any noise he didn't want to hear told a story that his pitching lines didn't. The idea of stepping into the batter's box against this man seemed even more terrifying. I flashed back to when his catcher and best friend on the team, A. J. Ellis, described Kershaw to me as a person who set his internal GPS at the beginning of each game and seldom altered course, regardless of the changing road conditions. Beyond his ability to make a baseball dance, I now understood why the opposition was at such a disadvantage. His life had just changed forever and he hadn't even flinched. We began a wide-ranging interview that lasted an hour and a half. As he talked about growing up in Dallas his cell phone shook even harder. Four minutes after Kershaw hung up with Close, his little secret was splashed across Twitter: Seven years for two hundred and fifteen million, with an opt-out after five. It was the largest deal for a pitcher in baseball history. One commenter pointed out that Kershaw would make seventy-five cents per heartbeat over the life of the contract—if he stayed in Los Angeles for the full seven years. In saying yes to the terms of the agreement, Kershaw joined Michael Jordan as the only other American athlete to earn an average of at least \$30 million a season over the course of a multiyear deal. And, just as important to Kershaw's nagging itch to control his life, he was granted the ability to hit the eject button after five years just in

case bad things happened that he couldn't foresee in that moment. If he played out the entirety of his contract and hit the open market again as a free agent at age thirty-two. If he bolted after five years he'd be just thirty. Either way, this deal left him primed to sign another one just like it right as he was leaving his twenties, when the viability of the new Dodgers model would be more clear. After the incredible run Los Angeles went on to close out the 2013 season, its clubhouse was relatively stable. But Kershaw knew it took only one superstar ego to engulf the rest of the locker room in flames. The Dodgers' new owners were rich beyond belief, and that money allowed them to load their roster with all-stars. A handful of them were time bombs dressed as humans, which scared Kershaw, because what he wanted more than anything was to win championships. At the beginning of the season, the Dodgers wanted Kershaw to sign a fifteen-year extension, which, being longer than half of his life, was impossible for him to comprehend. Eventually they settled on a third of that. In the end it came together quickly. On that Monday when Kershaw told me he was busy, he was in Florida for a private event thrown by Dodger ownership that had been on the books for weeks. He'd planned on flying home right after. But while he was still in the room, two of the team's owners cornered him. Since buying the Dodgers in May 2012, Guggenheim Partners, a financial services firm out of Chicago, had added over \$700 million in salary commitments to players. But they worried that if they let Kershaw walk, Dodger fans would never forgive them. The CEO of the company, Mark Walter, considered re-signing Kershaw as one of the Dodgers' top priorities. That night, two of the Dodgers' co-owners, Todd Boehly, the president of Walter's company, and Magic Johnson, the Laker icon, approached Kershaw. "What can we do to get this deal done?" they asked him. They had a jet. They were heading back to Los Angeles and wouldn't take no for an answer until he agreed to join them. So the three of them hopped on the plane at 11 p.m. and landed in L.A. in the middle of the night. Close ironed out the details of the contract with the club's front office. After a year of uncertainty, the impasse was over. But first Kershaw had to take a physical. On Tuesday, the club stuck him in an MRI tube for what felt like forever. They did separate scans on both of his hips, his back, his throwing shoulder, and his elbow. Though Kershaw had never spent a day on the disabled list in his six-year career, \$215 million was a lot of money—the most cash the Dodgers had ever promised an athlete, and by a long shot. The five MRIs took four hours. After they all came back clean, Kershaw flew home to Dallas Tuesday night. When I rang his doorbell the next day, Close was finalizing the deal. I asked Kershaw if he wanted to turn on the news. He shrugged, got up from the table, and walked toward the small television that sat on the marble counter tucked in the far corner of the kitchen. "Isn't it amazing how fast it gets out?" he said. "Do you want to listen to this or no?" I did. When he flipped on the TV, it was already set to MLB Network. A red "BREAKING" banner crawled across the bottom of the screen with news of his contract details. He stood in front of the television alone and watched. His phone continued to buzz. "It's funny who texts you," he said. He didn't want to reply to anyone yet. "As soon as I get started I'll want to get through all of them." His iPhone kept lighting up. I asked how many texts he'd received. "Twenty-nine," he said. Many of those came from the text chain used by his fantasy football league, which included a dozen of his Dodger teammates. Another text came in from his childhood friend and current Detroit Lions quarterback Matthew Stafford. The two boys had played freshman football together in high school, with Kershaw hiking the ball to Stafford from the center position. Since Stafford had bought a home in Detroit and lived there in the off-season, Kershaw saw him around their old neighborhood only once or twice a year when he came back to visit family. "Congrats," Stafford wrote. "And yours—we're buying dinner next time I see you. Well deserved." Kershaw also heard from his manager Don Mattingly's son Preston. A high school shortstop out of Evansville, Indiana, the younger Mattingly had been the Dodgers' supplemental first-round pick in 2006—the club's compensation for losing free agent pitcher Jeff Weaver to the Angels. Los Angeles took him thirty-first overall, twenty-four picks after they selected Kershaw. The two had played together in the organization's minor-league system, and remained close friends even though Mattingly never made it to the big leagues. I watched Kershaw watch with rapt attention as the analysts on television discussed his worth. When they began to show highlights, he made a face. "It looks gross to see yourself throwing so much," he said, as he turned the television off. It had been three months since the worst game of his life. When Kershaw took the mound in St. Louis for Game 6 of the NLCS, he was supposed to dominate; he had given up just five earned runs total in his last seven starts combined. Kershaw said he had not watched tape of the game, and that he never would. "That was a tough one for me," he said. "It's still not easy to digest. We didn't score but I think if I had pitched better His voice trailed off. "If I had pitched better and we felt like we were in the game, we might have won. It's never one person's fault but it kind of feels that way for me. Who knows if we would have won Game Seven or not, but it definitely stings." I asked him if the distance from that night had given him any more clarity as to what went wrong. But to him there was no mystery. "My stuff just wasn't very good that day," he said. "Was there a moment before the game where he felt something was off?" "No," he said. "I usually feel the same. It's never like, 'Oh my gosh I'm gonna suck,' or 'Oh my gosh I'm gonna dominate.' Some days yours—I'll go out there and watch my bullpen and yours—I'll ask if I even made the high school team. I don't throw one strike," he said, shaking

his head. "But then once you get on the mound it's completely different. Sometimes it's just really bad for whatever reason. So you own up to it. It was my fault we lost. I pitched bad, bad time to do it." We did our interview and then he showed me around his house. We walked back past the Ping-Pong table and into his office. It was littered with baseball memorabilia. One wall had a framed lineup card from his first major-league start: another game against the Cardinals. It turned out that the first big-league batter he ever faced was his future Dodger teammate and good friend Skip Schumaker. He struck him out. Kershaw liked to remind Schumaker every day that he was his first-ever strikeout victim. Schumaker always shot back that Kershaw owed him his career. Those days were over, though: Schumaker was no longer a Dodger. He'd signed with the Reds in the off-season. Kershaw's friend Nick Punto had moved on, too. Oakland had given him a two-year deal. Next to the framed lineup card of Kershaw's first game was the lineup card for his first win. Another wall hoisted his framed all-star jerseys. The ball he hit for a home run on opening day in 2013 sat among other treasures behind a glass case. One of those mementos was a Don Mattingly autograph he acquired as a child, one of the first signatures he ever collected. He opened a closet with binders full of childhood memories his mom had put together for him, and pointed out a fancy desk he had never once used. On that desk sat a poster board Ellen was using to run a pool with her friends to pick the winner of The Bachelor television show. Life for Kershaw went on. Though they didn't yet have children of their own, the Kershaws loved living across the street from that school. It was two blocks from Ellen's parents' home, and half a mile from his mother's. When the lot next door went up for sale they scooped it up, too, thinking it would make for a perfect yard for their future family. Kershaw pointed out a spot where they might add a pool. "All of my friends from home are single but in baseball everyone has kids," he said. Because he'd been in the league for six seasons it was often difficult to remember he was still just twenty-five years old. Sometimes Kershaw ventured across the street to shoot hoops on the school's playground. He didn't think any of the children knew who he was, or if they did, they weren't impressed. It was Dallas, after all. He had been a little boy here once, too, and had cheered his heart out for the Rangers. As an adult, he wore number 22 as an homage to his favorite player, former Texas first baseman Will Clark. As he stood in his backyard and watched the kids play, the enormity of the contract he just signed seemed to hit him. In a few hours, Ellen would return and some high school buddies would come over and barbecue to help him celebrate. Twelve months later he and Ellen would welcome a child of their own, a daughter they named Cali Ann. "I hope to never take for granted the amount of money I was given and hope I can help a lot of people with that," he said as he walked me out. "That's ultimately what you'll be judged for at the end of your career—how much of an impact you made off the field." He continued. "As far as on the field, nobody cares about how much money you're making if you perform," he said. "Mike Trout made five hundred thousand dollars last year and he's the best player in the game. Nobody really cares how much money you're making if you win a World Series. That's what the fans want, that's what we want, that's what ownership wants, and I think that's why I signed on. We have a good chance to do that." I asked him how his life had changed since he woke up that morning. He smiled. The money wouldn't change anything, he said. It wouldn't make him soft. "Obviously it's a huge, huge gift and responsibility and I'm really excited about it," he said. "But at the end of the day it doesn't change the fact that I have to go out and dominate."