

## *Introduction*

**A**S PHILLY SPORTS fans, we have to stop lying to ourselves. We aren't bad fans. We're not the "uncontrollable mob scene" Mike Schmidt described or the Santa-hating thugs national sportswriters describe when blending 40 years of unrelated incidents into one stereotype. At the same time, we're not "the best fans in the world," as Eric Lindros once called us and as we often call ourselves. We're not the "most passionate, most knowledgeable" fans (a default compliment bestowed on us by dozens of players and announcers), nor are we boozers who throw up on children and beat up tourists wearing the wrong colors. We're not front-runners, as Jimmy Rollins once called us, but we're not as loyal as we claim to be, and while Ryan Howard compared the fan-player relationship in Philly to "brotherly love," he hasn't yet seen how rough his older sibling can be.

As a fan base, we are quick to anger and hold long grudges. We are pessimistic, suspicious, and judgmental. We assume the worst about players' motives, take innocent mistakes personally, interpret weaknesses as character flaws, then dwell on them until they outweigh the strengths. We never let facts get in the way of our opinions, and we rush to form-fit players into our mythology of failure: instead of wondering how a player can help win a championship, we brace ourselves for the moment he will lose one. We also can be quick to forgive,

protective, and gracious, but we have a bad habit of hiding those virtues from players until they have been retired for 20 years.

Worst of all, we back the wrong horses. We hate players we really should love, and we sometimes embrace players we would be better off holding at arm's length. Winning a championship is an easy way for a player to get on our good side, but it isn't foolproof, as Mike Schmidt will tell you. Players who fall short of a championship get it far worse. It's one thing to forever curse the name Terrell Owens or Shawn Bradley, but we bared our teeth to inoffensive guys like Scott Rolen, and we've had more sympathy for scandal-ridden politicians on their way out the door than for the typical Eagles quarterback. Meanwhile, we make a hero of Len Dykstra, a marginal star and disagreeable person, and we celebrate hard hitters like the Buddy Ryan-era Eagles, even though they were a danger to both themselves and others.

Our most fascinating sports heroes occupy a buzzing bipolar region of our collective psyche. We try to simultaneously love and hate them, cheer them and vilify them. These are the players who truly shape Philly sports history: Dick Allen and Donovan McNabb, Eric Lindros and Allen Iverson. They weren't the greatest players, but they dwell in our pantheon beside immortals like Julius Erving and Bobby Clarke because they were so remarkable, so relevant, so likely to come up in conversation 10 years after their retirement and provoke an argument.

If we can unlock the secrets of our fan neurosis, understand why we love so madly and hate so badly, and accept as fans that our relationship with these players is not healthy, then we can move forward. This book is many things: a history, a countdown, a moody Valentine to the players who shaped our lives. But it's also an *intervention*. We make ourselves miserable. It's not the teams or the players, at least not totally. It's us.

I can say this because I am one of you. I cried during Super Bowl XV, nearly threw up after Game 6 the 1993 World Series, tossed and turned in my sleep after NFC Championship losses that spanned nearly a decade. I endured the quarter century of misery from 1983 to 2008, growing from a preteen in a Ron Jaworski jersey to a writer watching Ryan Howard strike out from the press box. It was 25 years of disappointment, worse than anything our parents endured. At least the old-timers who dwell on the Phold of 1964 could enjoy the 1960

Eagles and 1966–1967 76ers. Children grew to be parents wondering what a championship parade down Broad Street would look like. It was brutal.

But it wasn't all misery. There were pennants and Stanley Cup Finals and Bounty Bowls. There were cheers, celebrations, and playoff parties. Yet we reflexively forget the good times, because we're conditioned to perceive anything short of a championship as a catastrophe. So we have dwelled on the failures and turned against our best players. We've all done it. But it isn't good: not for the players, the teams, ourselves, or one another.

*But our best players let us down, you say. Many of them did. But championships are rare, everywhere but in New York. A player can be great even if he falls short of a championship. A player can be laudable and praiseworthy even if he doesn't come across as the toughest, meanest, craziest guy on the field (ice, court). The sooner we accept these things, the less miserable we can all be about the fan experience. Every sports hero in the world doesn't have to live up to the Chuck Bednarik standard.*

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I COME BOTH to praise Chuck Bednarik and to bury him.

Five decades ago, Bednarik, aka Concrete Charlie, aka the NFL's last 60-Minute Man, led the Eagles to their last championship. Bednarik played 58 minutes in the championship game, playing center on offense, linebacker on defense, and snapping for field goals and punts. He made the game's final tackle, stopping Hall of Fame running back Jim Taylor at the 9-yard line, helping the Eagles defeat the Packers 17–13, handing Vince Lombardi his only career postseason defeat.

Bednarik didn't just win a championship. He captured the imagination of Philly sports fans so thoroughly that his impact spanned generations. He was great, of course. He was also tough, a World War II veteran who knocked Giants pretty-boy Frank Gifford out of football for a year and a half and played until his fingers were gnarled and twisted. He also was eccentric, or at least he came to be perceived as eccentric as eras passed and 60-Minute Men who poured concrete in the off-season became as relevant to sports fans as medieval jousters. He was everything a city like Philadelphia could ask for in a champion:



**Chuck Bednarik**

(Courtesy of Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives, Philadelphia, PA)

a local guy, a blue-collar hero, a growling, scrapping overachiever who stuck it to both the Giants and the unbeatable Packers.

Bednarik set a high standard for sports heroism. Too high. The more mythic his accomplishments became, the more unattainable that standard became. As decades passed and memories faded, a hagiography grew around Bednarik, one that he fueled with regular interviews and media appearances. His tall tales grew taller, his condemnations of modern players a little more self-serving. His nostalgia dissolved into fogysm, with frequent remarks about how modern players “couldn’t tackle my wife, Emma.” He became our curmudgeon emeritus. By the 2005 Super Bowl, Bednarik was openly rooting against the Eagles, his feelings hurt by some disagreement with the team’s front office.

Despite the negativity, or maybe because of it, Bednarik inspired an ever-increasing reverence, even among fans who never saw him play.

Tom McAllister cited Bednarik as his favorite player in his book *Bury Me in My Jersey*, even though McAllister admits he's too young to remember watching Jaworski, let alone a player he knew only from faded photographs and old stories. Bednarik retired in 1962. He's as real to the last two generations of fans as Superman, a Superman who has gotten old and has nothing nice to say about today's "pussyfoot" heroes. The last five decades have been a ceaseless application of a Bednarik litmus test. We take each player, compare him to the Concrete Charlie we've constructed from Grandpa's stories, NFL Films, and documentaries, and assign a pass-fail grade. Bobby Clarke: pass. Mike Schmidt: too aloof, so fail. Moses Malone: a mean and nasty champion, so pass. Donovan McNabb: epic fail. Ryan Howard: to be determined.

As great as Bednarik was, he has become a symbol to us, not a player. That's why he's consigned to this introduction. The chapters of this book are about real players, guys we still remember clearly enough to say bad things about them. Modern fans love Bednarik and Richie Ashburn, and we'll say nice things about Steve Van Buren and Grover Cleveland Alexander because we've been told to. This book is about the standard Bednarik helped set, and why we've found it so hard to feel satisfied in the half-century since his retirement.

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TO CLARIFY FROM the outset, the Philly Fan's Code described in this book isn't a ranking of the greatest players in Philadelphia sports history. Obviously, Pat Burrell wouldn't make that list, even though he made this one. A listing of all-time greats, even one with a five-decade time limit, might include such players as Pete Retzlaff and Bob Brown, Johnny Callison and Garry Maddox, Paul Arizin and George McGinnis, and a bunch of other guys who won't come up once in a thousand barstool conversations or a hundred hours of sports-talk radio. Those players were great, and some were interesting, but they aren't very relevant.

The Philly Fan's Code isn't a ranking of the most beloved players in Philadelphia sports history. That list would be dominated by Broad Street Bullies, along with Erving, some current Phillies, some Buddy Ryan Eagles, and lovable curiosities like Vince Papale. A book about "beloved" stars would have to pussyfoot around our awkward relationships with Mike Schmidt, Charles Barkley, Donovan McNabb, and

others, and Bednarik taught us to hate pussyfooting. It would be dishonest to write a book about how we really loved Schmidt or McNabb all along. Any book that reflects the true Philly sports experience must address the love-hate. It must admit that some of our most respected players were booed mercilessly and some of our most disappointing stars were once hailed as heroes.

The Philly Fan's Code is about *relevance*: the ability of a player to occupy our gray matter, to make us laugh or curse 10 or 20 years later. It's about our need to boo Pat Burrell even though no one can put a finger on what he did wrong. It's about our inability to notice Chase Utley's slumps and our inability to ignore Ryan Howard's. It's about why we remember the 1993 Phillies more than the 1987 Flyers, why we loved Buddy Ryan's Eagles but thought the worst of Andy Reid's team. It's about rattling off the 10 players who have meant the most to us as fans and realizing that we've named guys like John Kruk and Ron Hextall: quirky, frustrating, flawed stars, not champions or even the best players we've ever seen.

This book started as a *New York Times* article. When the Phillies faced the Yankees in the 2009 World Series, the *Times* asked me, as the sports section's resident comedian and Philly guy (the two jobs are closely related), to write about why Philly's pantheon of sports heroes is such a rogue's gallery. After some soul searching, I realized that we value toughness and craziness over excellence. Fans in every city like to root for "dirty uniform" types, but we make a fetish of it, and it throws our judgment way off when evaluating our best players. The article earned a lot of attention—good and bad—so I began to expand on the concept of a code, or a rubric, that could be used to rank Philly stars on their Philly-ness.

Along the way, I discovered an untold history of Philadelphia sports. I didn't set out to write a revisionist history, but much of this book contains stories that diverge from our civic folktale, the one that bounces from Bednarik to Broad Street Bullies to the present day with a few pit stops of glory scattered along vast wastelands of disappointment. I excavated standing ovations for Scott Rolen and boos for Harold Carmichael, rediscovered the fascinating 1961 Eagles, even found a Julius Erving who would be torn to shreds by the modern media culture. You may not recognize the 1964 or 1993 Phillies as they appear in this book, and you may not recognize yourself, the fan who booed Ron Ja-

worski in favor of Randall Cunningham, the one who threw batteries at Dick Allen, the one who called Eric Lindros a wimp after his fifth concussion.

You can try to deny it. That wasn't you. "Real" Philly fans don't do those things. Those are the actions of an unruly handful of malcontents. It's odd that those malcontents are always there, always shouting down the cooler heads. They were there in 1964, booing even when the Phillies were in first place. They were there in 2010, turning on Ryan Howard for slumping through the NLCS (he batted .318 with four doubles, but never mind).

They are always there, because they are us. We may not all be morons who boo Santa or run onto the field to get tased by security, but we are all guilty of giving up too quickly, expecting too much, turning uglier than we have to after a strikeout or a loss. We are a lot like the players we root for: we can be a little tough and a little crazy, have great moments and awful moments, come up big and come up short. And we could do a little better.

The Philly Fan's Code is about 50 remarkable players, but it's also about millions of remarkable fans: why we love, why we hate, and what five decades of frustration, bitterness, and longing mixed with brief episodes of euphoria and a lot of irrepressible hope tells us about ourselves.

## THE RUBRICS

The Philly Fan's Code is just that: a code, an analytical tool for quantifying our emotional responses to athletes. In this book I've used the code to calculate the precise impact that 50 of our most remarkable athletes had on our regional psyche, how much they contributed to the mind-set and psychological stability of the contemporary fan.

This is all very scientific. I swear.

Each player is evaluated along four axes: Greatness, Toughness, Eccentricity, and Legacy. Once a player gets a one-star to five-star score in each of those categories, the scores are weighted, then totaled. The higher the score, the more remarkable the player is, and the more worthy of the title Philly Sports Legend.

Amazing, right? And it works. Just thumb through the book. Bobby Clarke is near the front, Mo Cheeks is toward the middle, Pat Burrell

is at the end, and Charles Shackleford is nowhere to be found. Science works!

A few notes before I explain the rubrics. First, players are rated on their post-1960 accomplishments. That affects Tommy McDonald, Hal Greer, and a few others. Second, players are generally rated and assessed for their contributions to the Philadelphia sports scene, not for contributions over their entire careers. Pete Rose is rated for his five years with the Phillies, not for anything he did with the Big Red Machine or was accused of in the Dowd Report.

Sometimes, though, it's impossible to rank a player on just his Philadelphia accomplishments: Wilt Chamberlain is just too big and important to talk about him simply as a center for the Warriors and Sixers, and we lose a lot of Cheeks and Curt Schilling if we don't mention things they did for other teams. But even when we veer away from Philly, in thinking or talking about a player, we are concentrating on the player's impact on us. When we examine Cheeks's National Anthem duet or Schilling's embarrassing blogging career, we do it through a Philly-focused lens: the Philly fan perceives these events a certain way, and some of them reflect back upon our region, even when the player is gone. For the most part, though, you'll see that each player's story ends when he leaves Philadelphia.

Now that we've settled that, here are the four categories and an explanation of the scoring. Each category is accompanied by a rubric that explains the scoring criteria. There are also benchmarks to guide rankings: it's one thing to rate toughness arbitrarily on a one-to-five scale, but once you start saying that a player is between Darren Daulton and Brian Dawkins on the toughness scale, you are really taking the guesswork out. Well, some of the guesswork.

## GREATNESS

A player doesn't have to be great to be loved in Philly, and being great doesn't always help. Philadelphia fans have been notoriously unappreciative of some of Philly's best players and have been downright cruel to many talented players whose only crime was falling short of expectations. And it's not like those expectations are too high: all a player has to do is single-handedly erase decades of painful sports memories



by winning multiple championships . . . while playing through injuries . . . for a league-minimum salary.

Still, if a player plans to linger in the minds and hearts of sports fans for decades, if he hopes to inspire debates, tears, or sighs of resignation long after he's retired, and his name isn't Jeff Ruland, he at least has to be a very good player for a few years. The greatness rubric rewards old-fashioned, individual excellence: Hall of Fame recognition, All-Star appearances, touchdowns, home runs, and so on.

In some regions, fan appreciation begins and ends with greatness. New Yorkers, of course, can fill their household shrines with unassailable superstars; there's little need to dredge up Bobby Murcer when Babe Ruth's bust is over the mantle and Derek Jeter is on deck. Heck, even New York's plucky auxiliary stars, their Phil Rizzutos and Harry Carsons, make it into the Hall of Fame. Smaller cities, like San Diego, have few champions but fewer disappointments, so they cherish what they have: Tony Gwynn's hits and Dan Fouts's touchdowns.

Philadelphia lacks New York's trophy case and San Diego's fabulous weather. With so few five-star, transcendent legends to reminisce about, we look elsewhere for sports validation. That's what the Philly Fan's Code is all about, and it's why greatness is just one of four axes on which players are ranked, and not even the prominent one. Rest assured that if Dan Fouts played here, we'd still be obsessing about his 16 career playoff interceptions (one fewer than made by Donovan McNabb, but in nine fewer games) and wishing we had a tougher, grittier quarterback in the late 1970s, like Archie Manning or someone.

## Rubric

**One Star:** The player was ordinary, a run-of-the-mill starter for a few seasons or a backup for a long time. To even register on the Philly Fan's Code with one star, you have to be a legendary bust (Jeff Ruland, Mike Mamula) or famously spunky. Benchmarks: Vince Papale, Jim Eisenreich.

**Two Stars:** The player was a productive starter who made a few All-Star games in his best seasons and is known for a handful of specific personal accomplishments, like being the best defensive player in the game or leading the league in penalty minutes. Benchmarks: Dave Schultz, Bob Boone, Andre Waters.

**Three Stars:** The player was an All Star in his best seasons and was a productive player for many years. Or, the player had one or two seasons of tantalizing excellence mixed among several mediocre, disappointing seasons. Or, the player had one amazing ability that separated him from the typical two-star player—like tape-measure home runs, tip-in goals from the crease, or backboard-breaking—but never achieved on a par with a four-star player. Benchmarks: Tim Kerr, Greg Luzinski, Darryl Dawkins.

**Four Stars:** The player was a second-tier Hall of Famer, a near Hall of Famer, or someone who looked unmistakably like a Hall of Famer for a few seasons. Such a player should have an MVP award and several All-Star appearances on his résumé, plus other awards (Rookie of the Year, Conn Smythe) and statistical accomplishments like batting titles. Four-star players may also be first-ballot Hall of Famers who achieved a large amount of their success outside of Philly, like Moses Malone. Benchmarks: Bill Barber, Reggie White, Steve Carlton.

**Five Stars:** An unquestioned first-ballot Hall of Famer, the kind whose name is brought up among the legends of the sport, and one who accomplished nearly all of his feats for a Philadelphia team. Benchmarks: Bobby Clarke, Mike Schmidt.

## TOUGHNESS

There are three kinds of toughness to explore here: physical toughness, mental toughness, and perceived toughness.

Physical toughness includes the ability to play through pain and the willingness to inflict it. Every sports fan likes a hard-hitting free safety or an enforcer on the ice. Only Philly fans expect hard-hitting goalies and enforcers in the bullpen. For players who aren't supposed to beat the daylights out of their opponents, we can judge toughness by determining how often they overcame major injuries and how frequently they played a full schedule.

Mental toughness is the ability of a player to break out of slumps, endure criticism, escape controversy, drive the lane, stay in the pocket when Lawrence Taylor is blitzing, or listen to three years of Larry Bowa screaming in his ear without strangling him. There's an ironic element to mental toughness: if a player can keep performing at a high level

even when half the fans in the city are sure he lacks mental toughness, chances are he doesn't lack mental toughness.

The perception of toughness is all of that dirty-uniform stuff: players ranting and raving after losses, crashing into the center field wall, not combing their hair, and so on. While many players who were physically and mentally tough also radiated this "perceived" toughness, like Brian Dawkins, there are plenty of otherwise tough players who took a lot of criticism because they didn't put on a fire-breathing façade (Schmidt), and there are plenty of blustery loudmouths in our sports history who were better at looking and acting tough than at being tough (half of Buddy Ryan's roster).

Finding a balance between the three kinds of toughness is tricky, as is assigning one "toughness" score for a whole career. Often, we call a player tough when we love him and soft when we hate him, tough when he's on the rise and soft when he's on the decline. If you don't believe that, I can pull a dozen newspaper articles from the 1997–1998 archives about Scott Rolen's toughness for you. These benchmarks help separate the truly gritty from the mushy.

## Rubric

**One Star:** The player was soft, and it showed. He avoided contact, didn't hustle, and couldn't handle criticism. He may even come across as a wimp. It's difficult to have a long career with one-star toughness in any sport; it's probably impossible in hockey and boxing. Even some of Philly's most well-known china dolls get a star-and-a-half, because bouncing back from 71 sacks requires a degree of resilience. There's one player in this book who earned less than one star, and I don't even have to name him, because you've already thought of him. Benchmarks: Von Hayes, Bobby Hoying.

**Two Stars:** This is the realm of the "paycheck" guy: he wasn't a wimp, but he didn't show much interest in fighting for the extra yard or diving for the loose ball. It's also the rating for players who were too flighty to approach the game properly, or who had an off-putting pretty-boy persona. Benchmarks: Derrick Coleman, Bobby Abreu, Mitch Williams, Peter Zedel.

**Three Stars:** This is the baseline for many of the rank-and-file players in this book. Three-star toughness means showing up every night

and putting out an honest effort without making a big show of it. It means battling through injuries multiple times. Some of our three-star players wore the aloof-sensitive-momma's boy tag for part of their careers but showed plenty of competitive fire and resilience other times. Some made excellence look too easy; at least one made it look harder on purpose but was still a formidable foe once you cut through the theatrics. Benchmarks: Hal Greer, Eric Lindros, Donovan McNabb, Tug McGraw.

**Four Stars:** These are the big hitters, fighters, and scrappers. The four-star player has a chip on his shoulder, plays through pain, overcomes obstacles, bristles with competitive fire, and inspires other tough-guy clichés. Many of our most beloved players have four-star toughness. Benchmarks: Bobby Clarke, Charles Barkley.

**Five Stars:** This is the Bednarik standard. To get to five stars, a player has to flaunt the toughness until it is almost mythical. The five-star player not only does anything possible to win, but scares the hell out of you if he loses. Benchmarks: Chuck Bednarik, Moses Malone.

## ECCENTRICITY

Most American sports stars aren't particularly crazy. They play the game, deliver some noncommittal sound bites from the locker room, then go home. After retirement, they become announcers or coaches, or they just fade away. Even their "odd" behavior falls into predictable patterns: end-zone dances, blue-line scuffles, self-promoting press conferences, sad lapses into drug abuse or antisocial behavior, post-retirement lunges into reality television.

Philly sports stars do sit-ups in suburban driveways, deliver locker room soliloquies about other planets, and beat up visiting Russian teams. After retirement, they retreat into bunkers, manipulate the stock market, write New Age manifestos, and deliver racist rants to state legislatures. Many of our greatest players acted a little neurotic during their playing days. A few acted downright delusional. One or two were just terrifying. Their eccentricities made them fascinating during the long droughts between championships. We couldn't always have the best players, but Philly always had a player around who could make the rest of the nation (in Bobby Clarke's case, the world) laugh, gasp, cringe, or cower.

It may be going too far to call most of our sports heroes “crazy.” It’s better to say that they were eccentric, in about a dozen different ways. In a few extreme cases, we might have made them that way. At any rate, to score highly on this axis of the Philly Fan’s Code, a player had to do more than show up and win a few games. He had to kick up a lot of loony dust in the process.

## Rubric

**One Star:** The player came across as normal, well-adjusted, and pleasant, on and off the field, during and after his career. We’re rarely interested in these guys, even when they are quite good. Benchmarks: Hersey Hawkins, Brian Propp.

**Two Stars:** The player has one or two odd, endearing quirks, or the player has an inflated sense of self-worth, though not Randall Cunningham-level inflated. Benchmarks: Brad Lidge (quirks), Scott Rolen (inflated).

**Three Stars:** The player is rather unpredictable on and off the field. He’s capable of saying something wacky at a press conference or doing something unusual-dangerous-dumb on the field, though for the most part his behavior falls within reasonable parameters. Or, the player is perceived as exceptionally moody, sullen, or introverted. Benchmarks: Wilt Chamberlain, Dave Schultz, Jimmy Rollins.

**Four Stars:** The player made a career out of off-kilter behavior and was known as an eccentric during his career. Or, the player’s behavior became inexplicable after his career. The difference between a four-star and five-star player typically comes down to the player’s belief in other planets or conspiracy theories, or his number of police-related incidents. Benchmarks: Randall Cunningham, Charles Barkley, Terrell Owens.

**Five Stars:** Houston, we have a problem. Benchmarks: Steve Carlton, Darren Daulton.

## LEGACY

You may not have noticed, but we don’t throw many championship parades in Philadelphia. The handful of champions we have crowned linger for a long time in our consciousness. There are plenty of 17-year-

olds in Philadelphia who can tell you more about Bernie Parent than about whatever they learned in history class last week. Parent and the 1973–1975 Flyers left a legacy, easily the richest and most enduring of the last 50 years.

Some nonchampionship teams left long legacies as well, most notably the Buddy Ryan Eagles and 1993 Phillies. Second-rate players on these beloved teams are better remembered than the stars of weaker teams. Other near-championship teams didn't have the same impact. The 1983 Phillies were a lot of fun, but John Denny and Joe Lefebvre didn't make it into this book.

There's another kind of legacy in Philly, however: the legacy of controversy, scandal, shame, doubt, and disappointment. Once a player has spent a few seasons in the crosshairs, he is with us forever. If you can't win a championship, the best way to get talked about in this town is to be the most recognizable player who *didn't* win, and to hold that title for a few years. A lot of our most remarkable heroes, particularly from the last 25 years, were the mosquitoes who got trapped in the amber. They got stuck, weren't good enough to escape, and the inevitable flow of our obsessive criticism engulfed them, preserving them forever.

A player's "legacy," of course, seeps into the other Philly Fan's Code categories: being great, tough, and/or crazy leaves a lasting impression. The legacy rubric accounts for achievements that weren't rewarded elsewhere. A one-star legacy may sound low, but it's low only by the standards of our top 50 players. Typical players, even good ones who hang around for five or six years, have a zero-star legacy. Johnny Dawkins has a zero-star legacy. So do Kevin Gross and Danny Briere, Andy Harmon and Larry Christenson. A zero-star player is remembered by diehards. A one-star player is remembered by casual fans. A five-star player is a civic treasure.

## Rubric

**One Star:** The player was a well-known starter and sometime star for one of our less-renowned teams. Or, the player was noteworthy only for some dubious accomplishment, like being an all-time bust. The one-star player's accomplishments fade with time, which is why George McGinnis and Bill Bergey aren't in this book, though a handful of one-star types make the cut. Benchmarks: Mark Howe, Harold Carmichael.

**Two Stars:** The player was a low-key starter on a championship team; this includes mercenaries who played only a few seasons in Philly. Or, the player was one of the ensemble stars for a beloved near-miss team. Or, the player was otherwise ordinary, or downright bad, but generated a lot of scandal. There are many two-star legacy players who aren't in this book (Reggie Leach, Garry Maddox, Jamie Moyer). Benchmarks: Mo Cheeks, Brian Westbrook, Ricky Watters.

**Three Stars:** The player was one of the secondary stars on a championship team but was always a supporting character. Or, the player was a star for a near-miss team, enduring the typical amount of controversy such a player receives (for “not winning the big game,” and so forth). Or, the player spent several seasons as our sports whipping boy. Benchmarks: Bernie Parent, Eric Lindros, Charles Barkley.

**Four Stars:** The player was the superstar on a championship team. Or, the player was a superstar of a near-miss team but was so controversial, in Philadelphia and nationally, that his career shaped the Philly sports experience for several seasons. Benchmarks: Chase Utley, Allen Iverson.

**Five Stars:** The player was the superstar on a championship team and became a nationally recognizable symbol for the Philadelphia sports experience. If you could put a picture of only one player in a time capsule so your great-great-grandchildren could understand the Philly sports experience, this is the player you would select. Benchmark: Julius Erving.

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ONCE EACH PLAYER is rated along all four axes, his scores are weighted, with toughness and eccentricity worth a little more than plain-old greatness. Legacy gets its own small bonus. The result is a list that accurately maps the geography of the typical Philly fan's brain: who commands the most synapses, who inspires the most heated lunch-table arguments. Some selections and rankings may appear to be controversial, but before you send me an angry e-mail, explore your own fan experience. Who did you really spend most of your time cheering for, booing, worrying about, complaining about, pretending to be in the schoolyard, hoping to see when you bought a game ticket? Unless you are 70 years old, it wasn't Chuck Bednarik. It was one of the guys on this list.