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The Rivalry: Bill Russell, Wilt Chamberlain, and the Golden Age of Basketball

By John Taylor



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A BRILLIANTLY WRITTEN ACCOUNT OF THE NBA'S GLORY DAYS, AND THE RIVALRY THAT DOMINATED THE ERA

In the mid-1950s, the NBA was a mere barnstorming circuit, with outposts in such cities as Rochester, New York, and Fort Wayne, Indiana. Most of the best players were white; the set shot and layup were the sport's chief offensive weapons. But by the 1970s, the league ruled America's biggest media markets; contests attracted capacity crowds and national prime-time television audiences. The game was played "above the rim"—and the most marketable of its high-flying stars were black. The credit for this remarkable transformation largely goes to two giants: Bill Russell and Wilt Chamberlain.

In **The Rivalry**, award-winning journalist John Taylor projects the stories of Russell, Chamberlain, and other stars from the NBA's golden age onto a backdrop of racial tensions and cultural change. Taylor's electrifying account of two complex men—as well as of a game and a country at a crossroads—is an epic narrative of sports in America during the 1960s.

It's hard to imagine two characters better suited to leading roles in the NBA saga: Chamberlain was cast as the athletically gifted yet mercurial titan, while Russell played the role of the stalwart centerpiece of the Boston Celtics dynasty. Taylor delves beneath these stereotypes, detailing how the two opposed and complemented each other and how they revolutionized the way the game was played and perceived by fans.

Competing with and against such heroes as Jerry West, Tom Heinsohn, Bob Cousy, John Havlicek, and Elgin Baylor, and playing for the two greatest coaches of the era, Alex Hannum and the fiery Red Auerbach, Chamberlain and Russell propelled the NBA into the spotlight. But their off-court visibility and success—to say nothing of their candor—also inflamed passions along America's racial and generational fault lines. In many ways, Russell and Chamberlain helped make the NBA and, to some extent, America what they are today.

Filled with dramatic conflicts and some of the great moments in sports history, and building to a thrilling climax—the 1969 final series, the last showdown between Russell and Chamberlain—The Rivalry has at its core a philosophical question: Can determination and a team ethos, embodied by the ultimate team player, Bill Russell, trump sheer talent, embodied by Wilt Chamberlain?

Gripping, insightful, and utterly compelling, the story of Bill Russell and Wilt Chamberlain is the stuff of sporting legend. Written with a reporter's unerring command of events and a storyteller's flair, **The Rivalry** will take its place as one of the classic works of sports history.

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Taylor (*The Count and the Confession*) offers a vivid account of the fledgling days of the National Basketball Association and the intense competition between two of its biggest early stars: Bill Russell (of the Boston Celtics) and Wilt Chamberlain (of the Philadelphia 76ers). While both players were dominant men who anchored their respective teams, their personalities differed greatly. The quiet, reflective Russell turned a serendipitous showing in front of a scout into a legendary career largely through willpower and hard work, while the outgoing Chamberlain was a much more naturally gifted athlete whose skills drew attention and offers while he was barely a teenager. Taylor highlights this distinction, asking, "[C]ould determination trump talent?" Along with examining the physical and psychological battles between the two, Taylor depicts the NBA's raucous nature in the 1950s and '60s, when fights between players were frequent, and the brash Celtics coach Red Auerbach was routinely pelted with rotten tomatoes, lit cigars and eggs. Looking at everything, from each player's private demons to the racially charged era in which they competed, Taylor's book is by turns an intimate profile and a spirited look at the foundation of modern professional basketball. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review Few individual rivalries in sports match the legendary mano-a-mano basketball duels between Boston Celtic Bill Russell and the much-traveled Wilt Chamberlain. Russell led his team to 11 championships in 13 seasons, and while Chamberlain's teams won 2 titles, only once was he part of a championship team while Russell was active. Chamberlain became the poster child for individual accomplishment--he scored 100 points in a single game--but Russell, 35 years after his retirement, still epitomizes the ultimate winner, the teammate for the ages. Taylor, author of *The Count and the Confession* (2002), a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year, was initially drawn to the subject because, like much of his work, it dealt with the psychology of conflict. But as he interviewed many of those involved on the periphery of his subject--Russell declined to participate and Chamberlain is dead--he realized he had a potentially larger canvas. The rivalry coincided with--and accelerated--the NBA's metamorphosis from a relatively minor league to the media giant it's become today. It also produced two of the most celebrated black sports superstars in the post-Jackie Robinson era and in that context advanced race relations in America. While placing the rivalry in historical context, Taylor shows that Wilt wanted to win every bit as much as Russell but never quite understood, as Russell did, how to sublimate his ego for the betterment of the team. A serious work of sports history, this volume compares favorably with the best works of John Feinstein and David Halberstam on sports. *Wes Lukowsky*
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About the Author

John Taylor, a journalist for more than two decades, has been a contributing editor at *New York* magazine and a senior writer for *Esquire*. He is the author of four books, including, most recently, *The Count and the Confession*, a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year, and *Falling*, which *Entertainment Weekly* ranked as one of the five best nonfiction books of 1999. He lives in East Moriches, New York, with his wife, Jeannette Walls.

From the Hardcover edition.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Gina Gregg:

People live in this new morning of lifestyle always make an effort to and must have the spare time or they will get lot of stress from both daily life and work. So , once we ask do people have free time, we will say absolutely yes. People is human not just a robot. Then we request again, what kind of activity are you experiencing when the spare time coming to anyone of course your answer will probably unlimited right. Then ever try this one, reading publications. It can be your alternative throughout spending your spare time, the particular book you have read is usually The Rivalry: Bill Russell, Wilt Chamberlain, and the Golden Age of Basketball.

Janet Warren:

Playing with family in a very park, coming to see the marine world or hanging out with close friends is thing that usually you might have done when you have spare time, then why you don't try matter that really opposite from that. One activity that make you not feeling tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you already been ride on and with addition associated with. Even you love The Rivalry: Bill Russell, Wilt Chamberlain, and the Golden Age of Basketball, you can enjoy both. It is very good combination right, you still wish to miss it? What kind of hang type is it? Oh can happen its mind hangout guys. What? Still don't obtain it, oh come on its known as reading friends.

Harry Baxter:

Your reading sixth sense will not betray you actually, why because this The Rivalry: Bill Russell, Wilt Chamberlain, and the Golden Age of Basketball e-book written by well-known writer we are excited for well how to make book which can be understand by anyone who all read the book. Written in good manner for you, leaking every ideas and creating skill only for eliminate your hunger then you still question The Rivalry: Bill Russell, Wilt Chamberlain, and the Golden Age of Basketball as good book but not only by the cover but also by the content. This is one guide that can break don't judge book by its include, so do you still needing a different sixth sense to pick this kind of!? Oh come on your looking at sixth sense already told you so why you have to listening to a different sixth sense.

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