

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.
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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.

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Users Review

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The book The Rivalry: Bill Russell, Wilt Chamberlain, and the Golden Age of Basketball make you feel enjoy for your spare time. You may use to make your capable much more increase. Book can to be your best friend when you getting pressure or having big problem together with your subject. If you can make reading through a book The Rivalry: Bill Russell, Wilt Chamberlain, and the Golden Age of Basketball being your habit, you can get much more advantages, like add your current capable, increase your knowledge about many or all subjects. You can know everything if you like open and read a guide The Rivalry: Bill Russell, Wilt Chamberlain, and the Golden Age of Basketball. Kinds of book are a lot of. It means that, science book or encyclopedia or other folks. So , how do you think about this e-book?

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