

Hopkinton author resurrects Ted Williams for "Extra Innings"

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Ted Williams was a complicated man.

Before Hopkinton author Bruce Spitzer could reanimate Williams — whose remains were cryogenically frozen in 2002 — in his first novel, "Extra Innings," and place him in a futuristic dystopia, he had to study the Splendid Splinter's complexities.

Spitzer, the director of communications for the Massachusetts Bankers Association, traveled to the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y., read countless biographies and interviewed people who knew Williams.

He wanted to develop a deep understanding of Williams in order to pinpoint how the hall of fame hitter might react to the changes that greet him in 2092.

In his novel, he crafts a second life for Williams. And he wonders: If given a second chance to reinvent his career, would Williams do anything differently?

When Spitzer finished his research, he was amazed at what he found.

"(Williams) was this guy that was wonderful in so many ways, but complicated in so many others," he said.

"The best way to understand Ted Williams was to think of him as a genius," he added. "His genius was hitting. And he practiced constantly, more so than the average player. But along with that comes a downside — that single-mindedness you have as a genius sometimes causes problems."

The idea for "Extra Innings" was born six years ago out of a marriage between two of Spitzer's loves — baseball and history. He was watching a Red Sox game one night, during which Jerry Remy and Don Orsillo were discussing Williams.

Channel surfing through a commercial break, he flipped to a show about mummies and the afterlife.

It would be great, he thought, to combine William's cryogenic freezing with the question of life after death. In his mind's eye, he pictured what Williams would be like if ever unfrozen.

Spitzer began work on the novel, waking each day well before dawn to write.

During those two-hour sessions, he drew from baseball's rich history, while thinking deeply about the state of today's game. This inspired the way he imagines baseball many years into the future.

Spliced with nuclear material, steroids have grown stronger, resulting in hitters dominating pitchers. "The game becomes unbalanced, and the scores start to look like football scores," Spitzer explained.

To bring back some parity, baseball officials remove human pitchers and replace them with robots, he said.

"It was very enjoyable," Spitzer said, referring to how he felt while writing the novel, "because I've been a business writer all my life, and this allowed me to open up my imagination."

Fittingly, the novel will officially launch Thursday night at Fenway Park, a day before the park celebrates its 100th anniversary. Proceeds from the event will go to support the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation — a charity Williams himself supported.

So does Williams become a changed man?

Spitzer wouldn't say. The only thing he would admit is that Williams served as an excellent and compelling protagonist.

"Williams was a very, very wonderful character to put in this situation," he said, "because, like the rest of us, he was flawed."

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In his mind's eye, Spitzer pictured what Williams would be like if ever unfrozen.

In my mind's eye, I see a cranky, decapitated head on a dish.