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# Rules Of The Game: The Best Sports Writing From Harper's Magazine (The American Retrospective Series)



## Synopsis

Harper's Magazine has been America's preeminent monthly periodical for more than 150 years. *Rules of the Game: The Best Sports Writing from Harper's Magazine* takes a look into this storied magazine's unparalleled archive and uncovers funny, touching, exciting, intriguing stories of the sporting life, both professional and amateur, and what it means to us. These essays show that how we play and write about sports not only reflect our nation's character, but challenge it. Including stories from Mark Twain and James B. Connolly at the turn of the twentieth century, visiting with George Plimpton, Tom Wolfe, Bill Cardoso, and A. Bartlett Giamatti along the way, and continuing with Lewis Lapham, Rich Cohen, and Pat Jordan today, this collection is the definitive voice on sports-writing through the last hundred years. Edited by Matthew Stevenson and Michael Martin, with a humorous, insightful preface by Roy Blount Jr. (Fifth in the American Retrospective Series.)

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Library Journal Review This collection of great writings by Mark Twain, George Plimpton, and A. Bartlett Giamatti, to name but three, is the ideal addition to any library's general collection on Americana, sports, social studies, and, not least of all, baseball. If one knew nothing about this country, its history, and mores, one would be almost qualified for citizenship once these wonderful texts have been read, savored, and reread. From the emergence of the Davis Cup and musings (in 1938) about the future hold of television on sports and our lives to the assault on racism in sport and society, not to mention the grip of a sports team on small-town life, this collection is superior in every

aspect. On baseball, we move from the bleachers of Wrigley to the role of a sports hero in overcoming bereavement to Branch Rickey and Bernie Carbo. VERDICT This is sheer reading pleasure of a rare quality. Highly recommended for all sports fans.--Gilles Renaud, Cornwall, Ont. Selectism, March "Reading "Rules of the Game" is like getting a lesson in sports history from some of our finest writers while sipping an aperitif at the Algonquin Round Table. There is such a seamless bond between writer and sport, and Rules of the Game flows as smoothly as an Ali jab."--Ron Darling, Emmy Award-winning broadcaster "Great sports writing is as much an American tradition as the games that are played on our fields and courts. This all-encompassing collection from some of the finest writers in the history of our nation (Mark Twain on hunting turkeys) brings to life great sporting moments both personal and transformative in scope. These writings from Harper's are a treasure to savor for all of us who love sports and the words that they inspire."---Hannah Storm, ESPN SportsCenter anchor

## GOOD READ

Lots of good stuff in here. Definitely should be part of your library if you're big on sports-themed "best of" collections.

Great collection of stories! Bok was well worth the money!

Although I am not a fan of some of the sport written in this book, the write up is excellent.

It's rather unusual for a book to attract attention by listing a bunch of writers' names on the cover. That's particularly true when the names include George Plimpton, Mark Twain and Pat Jordan. Such is the case with "Rules of the Game," an anthology of sports writing from Harper's Magazine. If nothing else, a reader should know that the work inside is probably going to be rather well written. But does it work? That's a somewhat different story. Harper's is second-oldest magazine that is still publishing in America, going since 1850. It offers a blend of politics, culture, arts, literature, etc. Self-admission: I've never read a copy of it, which gives the book the extra advantage of having almost completely fresh material. But it's easy to ask, what's an anthology of sports articles going to be like when it comes from a magazine that does not emphasize sports. In this case, the results are wildly uneven. There are few writers here who seem to have done a great deal of work on sports. Plimpton obviously qualifies, and his work would be on any reader's list of favorite stories from here.

He has articles on Bill Curry, a former pro football center, a meeting between Muhammad Ali and a poet, and the boycotted (at least from the U.S. perspective) 1980 Summer Olympics in Moscow. Both articles use sports as a background for larger points, and are done very nicely. But then there is an article that serves as a tribute to Plimpton that really belongs in a different book. So it goes through the book. An excerpt of "The City Game" by Pete Axthelm reminds us just how good the entire book was. "Confessions of a Washed-Up Sportswriter" is a good reminder of just how far professionalism in sports journalism has come in a short time. "Brains, Baseball and Branch Rickey" is a fun profile of the Brooklyn Dodgers' executive, in part because it was written the year after Jackie Robinson's debut. "The Biggest Race Track Killing Ever Made" is a nice story about a gambler's big score that really brings another era alive. There are other good ones. Yet some of the other stories aren't nearly as successful. Sometimes the authors are trying to make big points and don't have the background knowledge to make the piece come together. Sometimes the stories are really dated. Sometimes they come close to being pointless. By the end of the 326 pages of text, the feeling of finishing mixes joy and relief. It would be easy to guess that readers of Harper's probably bring a certain attitude when they open a book like this, and it might go over well. The book received generally fine reviews. Even so, "Rules of the Game" may have trouble finding an audience among more traditional sports fans.

If you are a sports fan with literary inclinations, this book will satisfy your yearnings to read about sports and to be edified by good writing. The essays cover everything from baseball, to boxing, to tennis and the Olympics. Coming from Harper's, the expectation were high and all but one of the essays did not disappoint. Authors included are Pete Axthelm, George Plimpton, Tom Wolfe and Wilfrid Sheed, names from the world of writing with whom I was familiar. I was happily introduced to other writers whose works, based on my dipping into their writing in this volume, I am now eager to more thoroughly dive into - Rich Cohen, John Chamberlain and Guy Lawson, for example. The essays are all rich in their portrayals of times and people, like the treatments of Muhammad Ali and his charismatic personality, or the descriptions and insights about places like Flin Flon, Manitoba, where hockey is not just a way of life, but life itself, or the ineptitude of the Chicago Cubs and the attachment of their fans to that ineptitude, or Jim Bouton's struggle to save a minor league ballpark from the misguided and politically driven efforts to build a new stadium in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. This book leaves the reader with that inimitable feeling one gets when completing a good book - that you have entered worlds previously inaccessible and unimaginable and have become intimately entangled in them; that you have become privy to insights and observations that absolutely and

correctly categorize and capture a phenomenon; that you are somehow a littler richer, a little more knowledgable and perhaps even a little wiser than before you turned the first page. Read it and enjoy.

I have been a fan of Harper's for a number of years. This collection brings together a couple dozen sports stories from the past 100 years or so, written by some of the best writers out there. I bought it as a "filler" book because it can be read in snippets at a time, but found it hard to put down. A wonderful collection.

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