

Behee, John with Saylor, Tom. *Wave the Flag for Hudson High*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: Ulrich's Books, Inc., 1977. Pp. xi, 171. Illustrations. Paperback. \$9.95.

Though ostensibly written by John Behee with Tom Saylor's help, the book is dedicated to "my wife Madeline Saylor." "As-told-to" books have become a commonplace and oftentimes useful addition to sports bibliography in recent years. Current professional athletes, highly successful coaches, and those who hold a special niche in sports annals are the frequent subjects of these studies. Seldom do such books focus on the world of interscholastic sports as *Wave the Flag for Hudson High* does. Because of the unique subject matter the book holds great promise. Tom Saylor coached the Hudson High School Tigers from Hudson, Michigan. Between 1968 and 1975 the team spun off a 72 game winning streak, the longest in the records of American interscholastic football.

Though the authors' purpose is to write about the impact which the winning streak had on the small farming community, it is successful only as a hagiographic exposition of the coaching philosophy and tactics of Tom Saylor. His approach to football goes far beyond the X's and O's of offensive and defensive squads. He demands a completely team oriented approach to the game. Players are not singled out for mistakes or penalties, teams make mistakes and receive penalties. He does not use a star system, seldom have his young men received scholarships to universities for their football abilities, and all forty players on his team play in nearly every game. Rhetorically at least, he defines the value of the game in the personality development which occurs in the young people in Hudson as well as in his current coaching position in Angola, Indiana.

Saylor is a master at using histrionics and superstition to motivate his players. When preparing Hudson to play a Detroit team which had a

large number of key black players, he used shoe black on the faces, arms, legs, and hands of his demonstration team in order to get his regulars used to seeing "black." He nearly turned over a team bus on one occasion when he exhorted his team into a screaming frenzy before a critical game. He superstitiously follows routine. He always eats a pot pie before each game. The team bus follows the same route to the playing field before each game. Saylor is always the last to board the team bus for both home and road games. In order to generate positive attitudes, he coincidentally finds a four leaf clover on the football field and brings it into scull sessions on the week of a key game. All of these factors plus his technical competence (he uses a very basic system of plays) brought a highly successful program to Hudson, Michigan. Almost without exception, the townspeople, students, athletes and his assistants were all committed to the success of Tom Saylor.

While the book spritely chronicles Tom Saylor, the coach, it falls short of explaining the impact which the winning streak had on Hudson. The streak ended in 1975 and thus no long range perspective is possible. While citizens of Hudson were wildly enthusiastic about their Tigers and took great civic pride in their victories, there is no indication of how life in Hudson was improved or altered by the team's success. Few areas of sports historiography is as weak as that in interscholastic sports. But if we are to learn more about the impact of sports at this level, the focus must be at least equally if not more on the players rather than on the coach and the winning streaks. One gets little of this type of analysis in *Wave the Flag for Hudson High*. Ira Berkow's *The Du Sable Panthers*, Rick Telander's *Heaven is a Playground*, and Martin Rabovsky's *Destiny's Darlings* stand as superior studies of the impact of sports on the lives of young persons. Hudson High players who participate early in the winning streak have had several years to gain some perspective on what the team's efforts meant to them, but none are interviewed and only one is mentioned to any great extent. Football at Hudson appears to bring an almost total involvement on the part of the community, but there is little indication of the relationship which exists between the football program and other community institutions in Hudson, including the academic program at the high school. Only once is it mentioned that the coaches teach. And when Saylor was looking for a coaching position early in his career, he was willing to teach any subject in order to get into coaching.

Football is persistently portrayed as a grand American adventure. Euphemisms for God, football, and patriotism are most often capitalized, furthering the view of football as a coequal part of America's autumnal Holy Trinity. Even the title of the book is borrowed from American culture. It is directly taken from a *Sports Illustrated* article of 1975 by Douglas Looney who in turn borrowed it from the classic American ra-

dio program “Jack Armstrong, the All-American Boy.” The book lacks footnotes, bibliographic sources, or an index. It is filled with quotations of conversations which took place in huddles, on the field, in the locker room, in coach’s homes, and at Tom Saylor’s donut shop. Yet no references are given to attest to the accuracy of these statements. Therefore the book often reads more like a novel than a history. Proofreading would have corrected the several misspelled words which abound throughout the volume.

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