
TELANDER, RICK. *The Hundred Yard Lie: The Corruption of College Football and What We Can Do to Stop It*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996 (Second Edition, First Edition 1989). Pp. 7,217.

Football is America's most tradition-laden college sport, and part of its rich history is the occasional muckraking book or official report that exposes all the pigskin game's presumed vile excesses and corruptions. Beginning with the Carnegie Foundation Report in 1929, probing examinations of the state of college football have continued to present decades with such book-length reports on NCAA's governance as Joe Durso's *The Sports Factory* (1975), Paul R. Lawrence's *Unsportsmanlike Conduct* (1987), and John R. Thelin's *Games Colleges Play* (1994).

Adding to this literature are the exposes on football's brutality and exploitation of athletes, notably Gary Shaw's shocking portrait of Darrell Royal's program at Texas, *Meat on the Hoof* (1972), and John Underwood's *Death of an American Game* (1979). Telander's *The Hundred Yard Lie* is a popular treatment that embraces the whole range of scandals and misrule, from problems of governance to on-the-field physical abuse. First-person reminiscence is the basis of the whole of Shaw's account and, in part, Telander's book, and represents what sport historian Michael Oriard aptly calls "autobiography of disillusionment," as a subgenre of football nonfiction.

Telander is one of the few day-to-day sports journalists who is capable not only of writing with literary flair but also of writing a sports book of depth that reflects more than merely the transitory interests of the day and that probes deeper into our culture and our history. His *Heaven Is a Playground* (1976) is still valued as a classic look at the playground basketball culture of inner-city New York

Less stellar, however, is *The Hundred Yard Lie*, originally published in 1989, but reissued by the University of Illinois Press in 1996. The book lurches back and forth from Telander at his best as a probing and thoughtful researcher to his worst as just a ranting polemicist. One soon tires of his continuous fulminations and unfair language.

One understands the role of exaggerated comments to make a point, and typical is Telander's remark that "students actually attending college games and caring deeply about what happens on the field are now nearly as rare as raccoon coats" (p. 187), a statement easily belied by a look at any big-time football game played today. To be taken seriously, one's rhetoric must bear some relationship to reality.

To his credit, Telander does not just shake his fist at the powers that be. He also brings in wide-ranging research, a lot of it reworked from his own articles

for *Sports Illustrated*, such as his profiles on the grotesque Tony Manderich (of Michigan State) and the steroid-crazed Tommy Chaiken (of South Carolina). For his examination of historical origins to the current situation, Telander consults the work of Ronald Smith (in *Sports and Freedom*) and of James Weeks (in his dissertation on the ennobling ideology of nineteenth-century football). He examined football player psychology by examining an article on the subject in *Psychology Today*.

To explode the myth that big-time college football is an economic benefit to their host institutions, Telander consults Dr. James Frey for his articles on the subject in *Currents* and Douglas Lederman for his article in *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Telander makes a substantial case that football success is not related to economic bounty, but typically he exaggerates, allowing for no exception where the opposite might well be the case. Notre Dame, for example, is so much a bigger and wealthier institution than either Fordham or Georgetown, and that is, in part, because of its unparalleled history as a football power.

Telander soars in his elegiac pieces between the chapters, titled "Stretching," where he writes little wistful remembrances of playing football for fun in high school and college. The contrast with the horrors he relates in the big picture of the college turf is meant to be stunning. . . and it is.

Telander contends that the corruption is so ingrained in big-time, commercial college football that merely reforming the institution is impossible. Like Paul R. Lawrence, he suggests elimination of the amateur code, which has the virtue of eliminating a lot of problems immediately.

Telander suggests creating a pro league out of the CFA schools, but to this observer, this neither-fish-nor-fowl solution is not a solution at all. A college-sponsored pro league would change the complexion of the sport, and, once the public perceives that there is little or no relationship between the members of the football team it supports and the sponsoring institution, it will sour on the concept, and either drift to college teams with student-players or to the pro game. To take a slogan from the political arena, the only solution for fixing the ills of big-time college football is to "mend it, not end it."

Can a book written about scandals seven years earlier still have relevance? To answer that question in the affirmative, this edition features two new forewords by American studies professor Murray Sperber and Lawrence University president Richard Warch, and an afterword by Telander. Their contention is that most of the same problems that Telander addressed in 1989 still exist and still give the book relevance. The three scribes seem to have a point, as any look at recent newspaper sports sections seem to testify.

The Hundred Yard Lie lacks a bibliography and an index, and has deplorable omissions, especially for a university press.

—ROBERT PRUTER
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