
The Future of Sport and Sport of the Future

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The hero of *The Last Western* (Argus Communications, 1974), a novel by Thomas Klise, is Willie, who skyrockets to national fame out of George Custer Memorial High School in Houston. Willie's rapid rise to star pitcher for the New York Hawks results from his possession of a magic pitch. The setting is the United States of 1990, one step beyond the present madness. Willie, the son of a migrant worker, is a Chinese-Mexican-Indian-Irish-American, who has a rather striking physical appearance with his red hair, slanted-blue eyes, and red-gold-black-brown skin. Although Willie's career will go well beyond the diamond to the Papacy, the focus here is on his days as baseball player.

Klise uses this phase of Willie's life to comment on the present conditions of sport in our culture by peering into the future. What Klise reveals is not always very pleasant, but it is always very interesting and thought provoking, not to mention humorous. First, there is Willie in high school, nicely exploited by an indifferent coach whose main interest in Willie appears with the pro scouts and the bonus money. Second, there are the bizzare antics of Hawk's owner, Robert "Bob" Regent, wine merchant, multi-millionaire and near master of the world. Regent is a composite of the owners of your choice. Klise also examines the fan and his emotional needs, the political-patriotic connection with big time sport, and finally presents a thought provoking examination of the essence of sport by presenting the ramifications of the achievement of perfection as the norm in sport.

Klise's *The Last Western* is one of the most arresting and thought provoking novels of recent years. His comments on sport and sports should be examined by anyone who has a concern about the place of sport and sports in our society.