More Sports Books for Christmas

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As I mentioned last week, sports books are often considered to be the perfect last minute Christmas gift, and as promised, today I will offer several suggestions of sports books as gifts to add to last week's baseball book list. For those hearing the evening broadcast these are literally last second suggestions.

One of the major obsessions in America is golf, the quintessential upper middle class, upper middle aged game. And with at least the latter category growing rapidly in American society let me begin with two golf books. Harvey Penick and Bud Shrake who last year brought us the "Little Red Book," this year offer And If You Play Golf, You're My Friend: Further Reflections of a Grown Caddie. Penick is a golf guru of sorts and the long-time golf coach at the University of Texas. He offers memories of the game as well as tips for improvement in a folksy manner, along with a focus on Penick's student Tom Kite. Geoffrey S. Cornish and Ronald E. Whitten in The Architects of Golf relate the history of golf course design, profiles of course architects, and a 12,000 course index cross-referenced by designer. For the golf obsessed this one offers a different angle.

Football has produced more than its share of good books this year, with one of the best being J. Brent Clark's 3rd Down and Forever: Joe Don Looney and the Rise and Fall of An American Hero. Looney was a star in college at Oklahoma where he was kicked off the team, and a better than average professional player who was always considered a bit of a flake. He was deeply involved with the Sixties Counter-Culture, and drifted out of football and into Eastern mysticism where he found peace and solitude. Looney died in a solo motorcycle crash in 1988, and Clark has captured the essence of this sports eccentric.

Under the Tarnished Dome: How Notre Dame Betrayed Its Ideals for Football Glory produced one of the largest disinformation campaigns since the glory days of Richard Nixon. All the PR within the grasp of the Fighting Irish could not hide the hypocritical reality of a program that has reached new lows under Lou Holtz, the glib salesman who can hide the dark underside of intercollegiate athletics behind a string of mindless one-liners and phony motivational babble which seems to mesmerize otherwise reasonably intelligent people.
For Dallas Cowboy fans, and there seem to be a few out there, two books published during the year should fill every need. The Boys, by Skip Bayless details the building of the Cowboy's into a winner under Jimmy Johnson and Jerry Jones. An even better book is Turning the Thing Around by Jimmy Johnson and Ed Hinton which looks at Johnson's early life, his coaching days in Miami, and the rebuilding of the Cowboys. This volume contains a valuable chapter called "Hair" which tells you more than you ever wanted to know on that subject, except why Jimmy has never endorsed a hair blower, a hair stylist, or any hair products.

In The Whole Ten Yards Frank Gifford and Harry Waters offer a revealing account of Gifford's boyhood struggles as the son of an migrant oil worker, and his glory days at USC and with the New York Giants. This book is so good that it makes you wonder if Gifford ought to use Harry Waters to assist him with play by play on Monday Night Football.

This was in fact a good year for autobiography and biography. At the top of the list clearly is Arthur Ashe's Days of Grace: A Memoir which the tennis great and social activist finished just before dying of AIDS. Ashe discusses his views on sport, race, and other social and human issues, and reveals himself as a sensitive and decent human being who could be anyones role model.

Manute: The Center of Two Worlds by Leigh Montville is the moving story of 7'7" Manute Bol pro basketball center from the Sudan. This is an extremely well-written story of the clash of two cultures and the extraordinary problems of cultural adjustment. Bol has adapted very well to his new homeland, while never losing contact with his home and family, as well as the Dinka tribesmen who have been victimized by starvation in one of Africa's most vicious and least reported wars. If George Bush had read Bol's book, U.S. troops might have been sent to the Sudan rather than into Somolia. Instead Bol has gone on his own in the off-season to feed the hungry of his homeland.

And finally for boxing fans comes a new coffee table book Do or Die by French photographer Martine Barrat. In these photos of young fighters taken in the gyms of Brooklyn, Harlem, and the South Bronx, nothing escapes the camera's eye, and the result is instructive, haunting, and high artistic achievement.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau wishing you a Merry Christmas and reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.
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