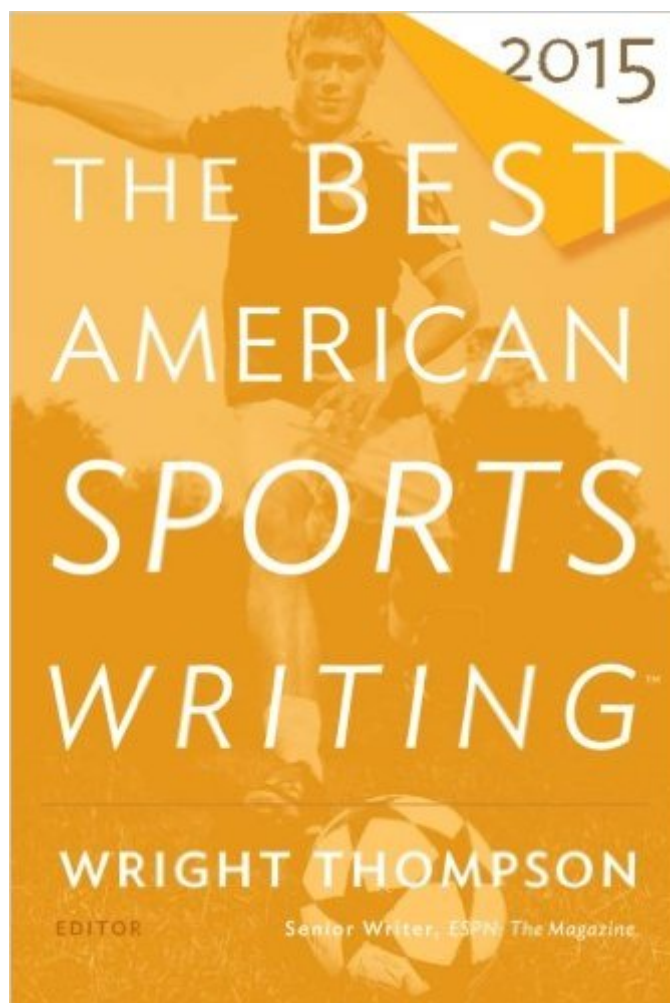


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The Best American Sports Writing 2015



Synopsis

The latest addition to the acclaimed series showcasing the best sports writing from the past year For twenty-five years, The Best American Sports Writing has built a solid reputation by showcasing the greatest sports journalism of the past year, culled from hundreds of national, regional, and specialty print and digital publications. Wright Thompson, a senior writer for ESPN.com and ESPN: The Magazine, proves more than up to the task by curating this truly exceptional collection. The only shared trait among all these diverse stories is the extraordinarily high caliber of writing, but collectively they tap into the pure passion that can only come from sports.

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Customer Reviews

As with all of the "Best American" books, there are hits and misses in this offering, and which articles are hits and which misses is an entirely subjective assessment. I can say that I enjoyed the vast majority of the pieces in this work. When it comes to sports writing, I like the articles that go beyond who did what, that probe the personalities behind the stories, that raise sport in general to a higher level, one that can reflect and, indeed, shape humanity. Perhaps the best story in this category from this book is "Haverford Hoops," about the Haverford College basketball team during the early 1990s. If you've never heard of Haverford--or have heard of Haverford but wonder why it might be included in an anthology of sports writing--, you're no doubt not alone. Haverford (which, in the interest of disclosure, I'll note was my undergraduate school) is a small, liberal-arts school just outside Philadelphia. In athletics, it plays in division III. In the early '90s, though, it might be more

accurate to say that the Haverford basketball team played the doormat for the rest of the teams in the division. "Haverford Hoops," by Chris Ballard, profiles the impressive winless streak that the team amassed as it threatened the record at the time. It is a story about people who realistically had essentially no hope, not even a distant one, of becoming professional athletes. It is a story about people who went on to become doctors and lawyers. And it is a story about a naively optimistic coach. But what makes the story work is the writing. There are 21 articles in this book, and all have something to recommend them. "Haverford Hoops" stands out for me, but I'd also recommend "One Thousand Two Hundred and Fifty-Eight Pounds of Sons," "The Two Michael Sams," "Precious Memories," and "Sins of the Preacher" as being especially noteworthy.

You really can't go wrong with the "Best of..." collection - you're going to get such a broad selection of writing that at least some of them will be strong examples. My favorite (which I'd actually read before but it's nice to have it collected) is "Money in the Bank," about the World Wrestling Federation. If you grew up with watching wrestling on Saturday morning, this certainly makes that nostalgia a little darker, showing the machinations behind the scenes. It's a powerful industry, and while it packaged as harmless entertainment, it chewed up a lot of the people who were involved in it. "Thirteen Ways of Looking at Greg Maddux" is very niche if you weren't a fan of his teams, but if you were a baseball fan, then this look into a superstar of his era is interesting and neat. Maddux is one of those athletes who we took for granted - he played for a lot of teams that never won a title, but were always good but not good enough. With a few years of perspective, this was a neat look back. "Jerry Football" about Jerry Jones is another strong one. It shows the crazy nature of someone who is successful at this level - owning one of the most storied brands in sports, and yet not happy, and often bitter. You can envy Jerry Jones his success, but in lots of ways he's consumed by it as well. It's got the right amount of gossip, and plenty of first-hand reporting. A good collection - easily four stars. There are no bad examples, just a few I wasn't that invested in.

I can't say that I've read every Best of sports writing books that have been published, but the original, Halberstam, edition remains the best. I thought I would stop reading these books after I believe it was last years edition. If that is the one I last read, then it was very much below the standards that I have come to expect. Happily, this new edition is a return to what I enjoy. I've always found that the best sports writing involves understanding people in a way that may not be obvious for the non-sports fan. It may not be the athlete (such as Payton Manning whose story closes this book), but it might be those close to the athlete (such as the son of the fighter Tommy

Morrison also in this book). Or it might just be about the fans of a team such as the K.C. Royals. There are stories within stories and sports can only be important in those cases as a means to view the other person. That is what fascinates me about excellent sport stories. This book provides a nice mixture of stories from several sports, but it doesn't neglect the sports that matter most to American sports fans. There is still the inclusion of lesser stories and some of much less interest for myself (eg, hunting; long distance swimming; and do we really need another Michael Sam story). But I'm not obligated to read everything in a compilation books. So choose what interests you the most and relax to a good long read.

This is my second "Best American Sports Writing" and enjoyed every story in the book. I particularly like the variety of sports including those that get little mainstream attention. I'm already looking forward to the 2016 edition.

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