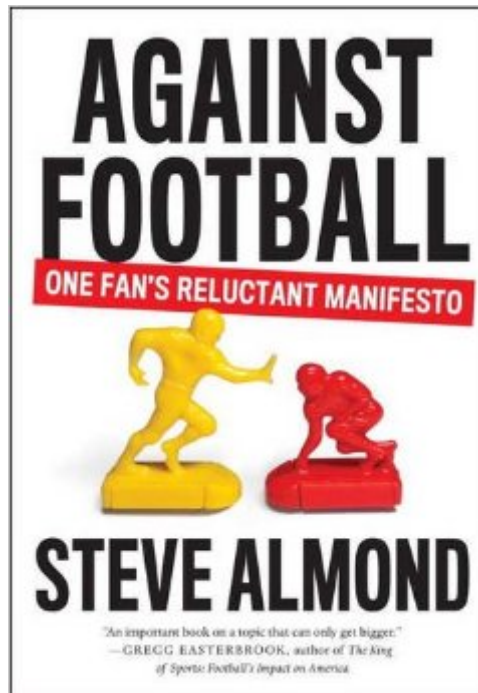


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Against Football: One Fan's Reluctant Manifesto



Synopsis

A New York Times Best Seller "Powerful...an important read." "Publishers Weekly" New York Times bestselling author Steve Almond takes on America's biggest sacred cow: football. In *Against Football*, Steve Almond details why, after forty years as a fan, he can no longer watch the game he still loves. Using a synthesis of memoir, reportage, and cultural critique, Almond asks a series of provocative questions: "Does our addiction to football foster a tolerance for violence, greed, racism, and homophobia?" "What does it mean that our society has transmuted the intuitive physical joys of childhood "run, leap, throw, tackle" into a billion-dollar industry?" "How did a sport that causes brain damage become such an important emblem for our institutions of higher learning?" There has never been a book that exposes the dark underside of America's favorite game with such searing candor.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Reading this book can serve as something of a litmus test. I've seen no critic "I use the term loosely" actually engage his arguments. Mostly they are flinging ad hominem non sequiturs. Those who react strongly against it "including the many who have flamed, insulted and aggressively mocked Almond in public forums" come off looking like reflections of the flawed culture he identifies. Critics react with unthinking passion, unleashing mouthfuls of pejoratives, often questioning Almond's manhood or sexuality in bemusingly "male" terms. For example, suggesting he possesses female genitalia reveals an essential misogyny; suggesting he must have a "big vagina"

â " seriously, it's a thing among his critics â " is just stupid, a transparent and reflexive attempt to overlay deeply ingrained male insecurities and obsession with size. Make no mistake: Almond is a true fan of football, especially of â " as we say in Broncos country â " "the hated Raiders." But he's also a thoughtful man who sees the stark contradictions and dubious ethics of supporting our modern civic religion cum blood sport. He focuses a good deal of his manifesto â " for it is that, rather than a deeper research project â " on the problem of brain injuries, but he identifies other, very real issues: misogyny, hyper-machoism, militarism-jingoism, rich owners fleecing and blackmailing taxpayers, tribalism over what is really little more than (in his words), "brightly colored laundry," the obvious disconnect between a highly professionalized (though its players are unpaid!) professional football farm system being connected to institutions of higher learning, the incredible amount of time invested in passive observation, and more.

I am of the demographic at which Steve Almond is aiming his book. I love football, both college and pro. I cannot sit in front of a television for 30 minutes to watch a sitcom, yet can devote 9 hours watching pre game talk, the contests and then postgame stuff each weekend. I love football. That said, Almond's book has done a remarkable thing: It made me think. And, despite my obsession with the sport, if I had a child, I'd probably not let him play football. The physical damages are too damning. I think Almond covers the bases (sports metaphor) well. There is the concussion debate, the entitlement college and pro players feel they deserve and the big money of the league - along with being tax exempt (that status came in 1966 when the NFL agreed not to schedule games on Friday and Saturday to clash with high school and college games, but aren't there Saturday NFL games at times?) The NFL is a snake that devours itself. Players are bigger and faster; collisions are more violent. Fans want to see that kind of action and their support perpetuates the growth and speed. Almond said it perfectly when he wrote that we're not necessarily rooting for our team, in reality, we're rooting for ourselves. In defense of football, though, players on the pro level know what they are getting into. They are paid well for their skills, although the average NFL career is only 3 or so years. Football is dangerous. They understand that and have a choice to play. Fire fighting is a dangerous career, but there is no attempt to boycott fire departments. That may be a dumb comparison in light of the importance of both jobs, but those working in both fields have choices to seek other employment if they want.

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