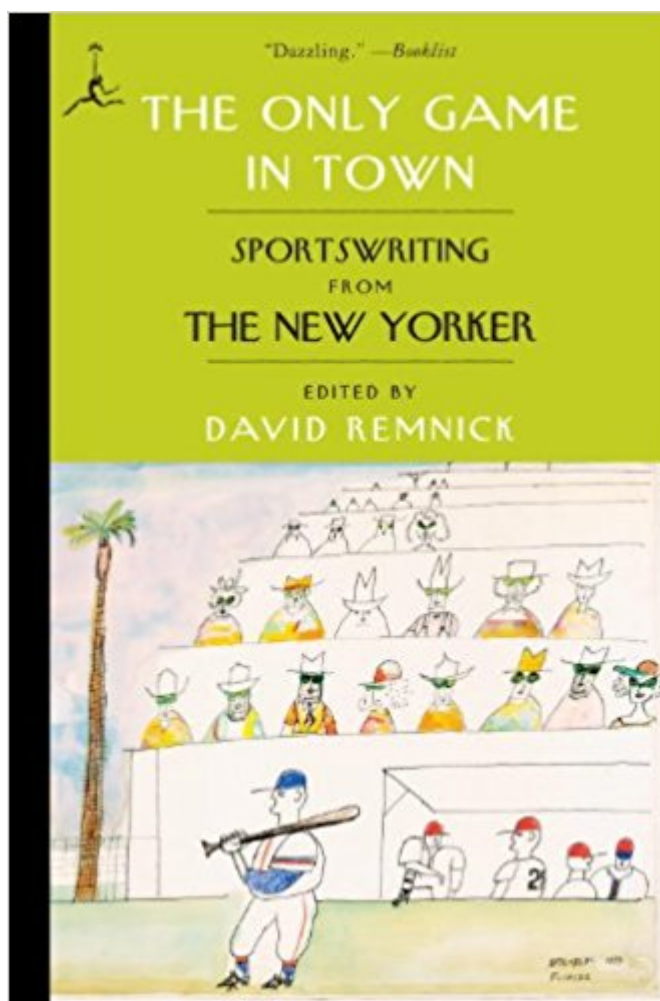


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The Only Game In Town: Sportswriting From The New Yorker (Modern Library Paperbacks)



Synopsis

For more than eighty years, The New Yorker has been home to some of the toughest, wisest, funniest, and most moving sportswriting around. The Only Game in Town is a classic collection from a magazine with a deep bench, including such authors as Roger Angell, John Updike, Don DeLillo, and John McPhee. Hall of Famer Ring Lardner is here, bemoaning the lowering of standards for baseball achievement in 1930. John Cheever pens a story about a boy's troubled relationship with his father and the national pastime. From Lance Armstrong to bullfighter Sidney Franklin, from the Chinese Olympics to the U.S. Open, the greatest plays and players, past and present, are all covered in The Only Game in Town. At The New Yorker, it's not whether you win or lose—it's how you write about the game.

Book Information

Series: Modern Library Paperbacks

Paperback: 512 pages

Publisher: Modern Library; Reprint edition (June 14, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0812979982

ISBN-13: 978-0812979985

Product Dimensions: 6.2 x 1.2 x 9.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars 13 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #482,178 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #64 in Books > Sports & Outdoors > Miscellaneous > Journalism #205 in Books > Sports & Outdoors > Miscellaneous > Sociology of Sports #219 in Books > Sports & Outdoors > Miscellaneous > Essays

Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Remnick's thoughtfully curated selection of New Yorker essays spans the gamut of the sports conversation. From sketches of Tiger Woods to contemplations of the branding prowess of Michael Jordan to examinations of how "the choke" differs from panic, Remnick's choices display a deep affinity for a variety of sports and an understanding of their importance in the modern discourse. The essays, written by wildly different authors ranging from Henry Louis Gates Jr. to Malcolm Gladwell, make for an enjoyably diverse reading experience. While readers may not be fans of a particular sport or athlete, the essays are universal; covering decades of sports writing, they speak to certain ineffable qualities of athletics and explore every facet of the games we play.

This anthology represents a great variety of what The New Yorker has to offer and is an excellent way to pass the time between games. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

David Remnick, editor of the New Yorker, never explains in his introduction what prompted him to pull together this dazzling collection of 32 sports pieces from the magazine, nor in the end does he need to. They justify themselves, dating from Ring Lardner's 1930 take on juiced-up baseballs to 2008 pieces by Anthony Lane and Haruki Murakami on the Beijing Olympics and running, respectively. There's a fine, multidimensional quality to these pieces, from Malcolm Gladwell's thoughtful reflection on the phenomenon of choking in sport (2000) to Henry Lewis Gates' shrewd study of Michael Jordan, athlete and marketing powerhouse (1998). Other articles include John Updike's iconic piece on Ted Williams' final home game (1960), Bill Barich's paean to horse racing (1980), and Susan Orlean's neat profile on Iditarod champion Susan Butcher (1987). Bonus: a liberal sprinkling of sports-related cartoons from the magazine. --Alan Moores --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A great collection of sports stories and profiles. The writing is superb if a little 'selected'. Good writing never goes out of style.

I bought this book for two of my nephews. The content was so good I wished I had bought one for myself and probably will. I started several of the selections and could hardly put it down. It touches on a variety of the "greats" and will be a book that sports fans will enjoy. The cartoons are fun, too.

Great book for all sports fans. Excellent variety of sports. Passion is found in every story. You will appreciate the depth.

Wonderful essays about the importance of athletics; very well-written and carefully selected. A classic and a keeper. Any 13-year old will be pleased to grow older with this. The New Yorker does it again!

We're big New Yorker fans to begin with; this is a great collection with great variety. Highly recommend it-- has a lot of great viewpoints.

This is a pretty much foolproof anthology. Most people know about The New Yorker's rich history of publishing great writing over the decades. The writers are a who's who of American literature. To take some of the best sports stories and put them in a book called "The Only Game in Town" is a natural. David Remnick has done that. The editor of the New Yorker showed his own sports writing chops with a fabulous book on Muhammad Ali, so it's nice that he didn't bother to delegate this assignment of putting together the anthology together. So a book like this is going to be really, really good. But how good? How is the typical sports fan going to enjoy it? That's a little tougher question. When I look at other anthologies, my usual standard is to see what the batting average is for interesting articles. Let's apply that here. There are some absolute, well-known classics here. Roger Angell's story on a college baseball game between St. John's and Yale retains its glory almost 30 years after it was written. John McPhee's profile of college basketball star Bill Bradley, "A Sense of Where You Are," fascinates to this day. And anyone could have guessed that John Updike's tale of Ted Williams' last game, "Hub Fans Bid Kid Adieu," would be in here. The best parts here might be the lesser known stories that therefore rank as surprises. Adam Gopnik has a terrific story on coaching kids' football, even if that hardly does the rich subject matter justice. Who expected an art history lesson in such a story, not to mention a touching personal tale? It might be my favorite story in the book, at least of those I hadn't read elsewhere. Charles Sprawson opens up obscure areas of sport with his story on long distance swimming, Arctic version. Nancy Franklin rekindled my interest on a pastime of my youth, ping-pong; she made me want to grab my racket out of the basement. There are some good profiles here too. One on Tiger Woods almost is more revealing now than it was then, considering what's happened to Mr. Woods in the decade since it was written. A quote from father Earl is particularly haunting now: "Tiger was not created to be a golfer. Tiger was made to be a good person." Whoops. Stories about Michael Jordan, Yao Ming and Lance Armstrong are well done as well. This being The New Yorker, there have to be some odd subjects. That's certainly the case here. My reaction to those stories were more mixed. Martin Ames has a short, pointed essay about "tennis personalities" that works well. Nick Paumgarten sucked me in on extreme skiing, Calvin Trillin taught me about the world of snowmobiling. But there were other stories whose charms proved easier to resist. Alec Wilkinson's look at "parkour" seemed a bit out of place. Herbert Warren Wind, one of the best golf writers ever, takes a tour of Irish golf courses that seems a little too highbrow for some. Can't say I made through John Cheever's essay on baseball or Don DeLillo's story on football strategy or Alva Johnston's story on a boxing promoter from a century ago. Oh, right, the cartoons are terrific, as you'd expect. "The Only Game in Town," then, is a lot like the magazine. There's a certain style that comes with the pages. Most sports readers are

certainly to enjoy a good portion of this book and make it worthwhile. And for passionate readers of the magazine who also like their fun and games, I have no doubt that this will be read and re-read for years to come.

For instance, "It may be that, compared to managers' dreams such as Joe DeMaggio and the always helpful Stan Musial, Williams is an icy star. But of all team sports, baseball, with its grateful intermittences of action, its immense and tranquil field sparsely settled with poised men in white, its dispassionate mathematics, seems to me best suited to accommodate, and be ornamented by, a loner. It is an essentially lonely game. No other played visible in my generation has concentrated within himself so much of the sport's poignance, has so assiduously refined his natural skills, has so consistently bought to the plate that intensity of competence that crowds the throat with joy." from *Hub Fans Bid Kid Adieu* by John Updike

Some amazing writers from various disciplines have contributed to the pages of *The New Yorker* in the magazine's 80-plus-year history. More than 30 of them are included in this wonderful anthology of the best from the world of sports, in itself a competition of sorts. One would not find these pieces in the back pages of a local newspaper. These are thoughtful, long pieces that go beyond the box score and records, or the simple accomplishments on the various fields of play. Some --- like "Hub Fans Bid Kid Adieu," John Updike's chronicle of Ted Williams's final game --- have become part of the larger time capsule of sports' legendary figures, both subject and author (a 50th anniversary edition of "Hub Fans" was published earlier this year by the Library of America). Others --- such as Lillian Ross's "El Unico Matador," perhaps the only profile ever written about a gay Jewish-American bullfighter --- offer people, places and events they otherwise would never discover. It is fitting that *New Yorker* staple Roger Angell "leads off" the collection with his famous report of a classic 1-0 extra-inning 1981 college contest between Frank Viola of St. John's and Ron Darling of Yale. (And if you want to know the details, in the words of the eminent baseball philosopher Casey Stengel, "you could look it up.") Adding to the enjoyment of Angell's tale: the presence and commentary of "Smoky Joe" Wood, a standout of the early 1900s and later a college coach himself. Other notable writers include John Cheever on fathers, sons and baseball; Henry Louis Gates, Jr. on Michael Jordan; A. J. Liebling on the 1955 Marciano-Moore fight; and John McPhee on Princeton basketball star (and later U.S. senator) Bill Bradley. But is good writing on its own enough of a draw? While there are five essays on baseball, it seems editor David Remnick tries perhaps a bit too hard to be democratic as he includes so many sports/games/activities. Maybe that's the point. In what other

mainstream publication would you find so much thoughtful prose on such diverse topics as surfing (William Finnegan), snowmobiling (Calvin Trillin), dog sledding (Susan Orlean), ping-pong (Nancy Franklin), and parkour (Alec Wilkinson; parkour is a jumping "sport" that seems more applicable to cinematic stunt work than athletics). Oddity for oddity's sake? Or is it perhaps a "snob factor" the historic magazine is after? Regardless, sports fans who hold The New Yorker in the same regard as The Sporting News or Sports Illustrated will no doubt welcome this edition into their library. ---

Reviewed by Ron Kaplan

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