



Sole Influence: Basketball, Corporate Greed, and the Corruption of America's Youth

By Larry Bird, Jackie Macmullan, Pat Riley

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Larry Bird captured the imagination and admiration of basketball fans throughout his thirteen-year career with the Boston Celtics with his trademark style of creative, intelligent, exciting, and hard-nosed play. And then, last year in his rookie season as head coach of the Indiana Pacers, he infused the team with these same qualities -- and the results were remarkable. He turned around a slumping franchise and led the Pacers to the conference finals. To finish off a great season, Bird was named the NBA's "Coach of the Year" -- quite an accolade for Bird, who had never coached before and surprised many fans with his unusual and unorthodox coaching methods.

This book is a look into one of the greatest minds to have ever stepped on a hardwood court. Larry Bird shares his inner thoughts on basketball that to date only his Celtic teammates and Pacers players have been privy. From dissecting offensive and defensive strategies to assessing the talent of NBA players; from sharing the genesis of his coaching philosophies to how he deals with today's overpriced and temperamental players, it's all there. This book is Larry Bird's basketball playbook, and it's the one book every basketball fan will want to read.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

The first sentence of Larry Bird's candid post-player memoir begins blandly enough: "On August 18, 1992, I announced my retirement from the Boston Celtics." It's the one that follows--"It was one of the happiest days of my life"--that sets the tone for the book. Most stars have to be pulled off center stage, but as *Bird Watching* makes clear, the former Celtic legend who returned home to eventually coach the Indiana Pacers is certainly a rare bird. He's not afraid to ruffle feathers. And he's not afraid to tell his truth.

Perhaps the most striking revelations concern his heart. On top of the back pain that plagued him through much of his career, from time to time Bird experienced the feeling--and disorienting flush--of an irregular heartbeat, which he kept hidden from the Celtics. Even now, in the stress-filled world of coaching, Bird has almost passed out on the bench a couple of times--but he remains a fierce competitor. "I'm not going to be stupid about this heart condition, but I'm not going to live my whole life in fear of this thing either. If it goes, it goes."

Bird Watchings spends virtually no time with Bird the player; he's not one for looking back. He's more interested in explaining his evolution and thinking as a coach, examining the current state of the NBA, and picking apart the Pacer's disastrous 1999 playoff loss to the Knicks. He does, however, reminisce about his amazing connection to Magic Johnson, comparing it to the bond between Ali and Frazier. "I knew it was going to be like that forever after I played him in college for the national championship," Bird writes. "I never came up against anyone, other than Magic, who could challenge me mentally. Magic always took me to the limit." From Bird, it's hard to imagine a more heartfelt compliment. --Jeff Silverman

From Publishers Weekly

Fans expecting the literary highlight reel of the NBA legend's championship years with the Boston Celtics may be initially put off by this loosely organized collection of opinions and reminiscences. They should stick with it, however, because ultimately the book is an endearingly honest self-portrait of a humble man who has made the most of his opportunities. Celtic fans will be titillated by the frank reports of just how Larry Legend wound up leaving Boston. Being a give-it-to-me-straight kind of guy, he was disgusted with the disingenuous ways of the Celtic front office, where he briefly worked after his playing days. Bird, now the head coach of the Indiana Pacers, also explains, quite briskly, how his relationship with fellow Celtic Kevin McHale went sour: as their careers wound down, McHale and another teammate went behind Bird's back to reporters with complaints that his play had become selfish. But Bird's refusal to pull punches doesn't hit only his adversaries: he admits that he was lucky that his good friend Rick Robey was traded away from the Celtics, because the good times they had together got in the way of Bird's career. He also writes that not he, but Jerry Sloan of the Utah Jazz should have been named Coach of the Year in 1998. The Hick from French Lick solidifies his reputation as a straight-talker unimpressed with his own legend. (Sept.)

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From Library Journal

This intelligently written collaboration covers the second act in Bird's life. Drive, his 1989 autobiography (written with Bob Ryan), covered the first act--his early life and his career as a basketball player. The second act opens when a debilitating congenital back condition forced Bird's 1992 retirement as an NBA player, a retirement he postponed so that he could participate in the 1992 Olympics as a member of the U.S. Dream Team. Any sports fan can tell you what happened next: surgery, recovery, the job as head coach of the

Indiana Pacers, being named NBA Coach of the Year at the end of his rookie year, and induction into the NBA Hall of Fame. These recent events have launched an avalanche of Bird biographies. Libraries that need a comprehensive biography of Bird may wish to choose one of the other recent titles. However, for libraries that already have a good Bird biography, Bird's insightful observations on other NBA participants make Bird Watching an excellent addition to most sports collections.

-ATerry Jo Madden, *Boise State Univ. Lib., ID*

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