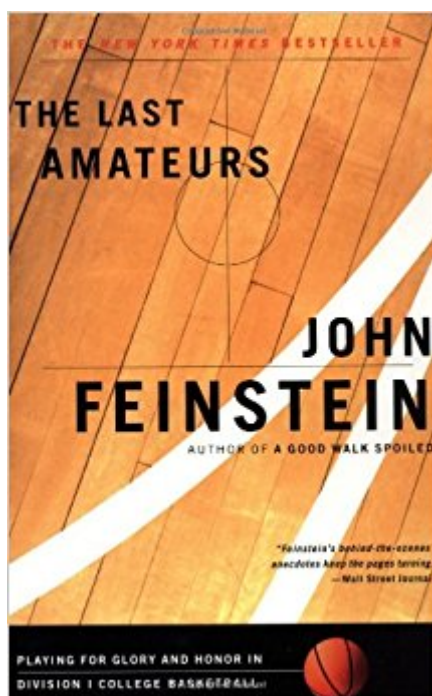


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The Last Amateurs: Playing For Glory And Honor In Division I College Basketball



Synopsis

Like millions who love college basketball, John Feinstein was first drawn to the game because of its intensity, speed and intelligence. Like many others, he felt that the vast sums of money involved in NCAA basketball had turned the sport into a division of the NBA, rather than the beloved amateur sport it once was. He went in search of college basketball played with the passion and integrity it once inspired, and found the Patriot League. As one of the NCAA's smallest leagues, none of these teams leaves college early to join the NBA and none of these coaches gets national recognition or endorsement contracts. The young men on these teams are playing for the love of the sport, of competition and of their schools. John Feinstein spent a season with these players, uncovering the drama of their daily lives and the passions that drive them to commit hundreds of hours to basketball even when there is no chance of a professional future. He offers a look at American sport at its purest.

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Customer Reviews

If there's any doubt about John Feinstein being one of sport's true believers, *The Last Amateurs* readily dispels it. After years of smartly dissecting our games at their highest levels in bestsellers like *The Majors*, *A Good Walk Spoiled*, and *A Season on the Brink*, he returns to dissecting our games at their purest level, ground he first staked out quite stirringly in *A Civil War*, his chronicle of Army-Navy football. In *The Last Amateurs*, he mines the 1999-2000 season of Patriot League basketball. Given the high-stakes, high-profile, and often dirty world of college hoops these days, Feinstein comes up with a remarkably refreshing place to visit, a sporting environment short on scandals, prima donnas, and sneaker contracts, but long on a pure passion for the game that

complements achievement in the classroom. In the league's seven schools--Bucknell, Lehigh, Lafayette, Colgate, Holy Cross, Army, and Navy--academics come first, the hardwood second. These are campuses populated by students who happen to be athletes, not athletes stopping off on the way to lucrative careers in professional sports. Indeed, these are young athletes who have their post-college focus on the rest of their lives, not the NBA. Sports, for them, builds character, not bank accounts. Still, the Patriot League is a Division I conference, with its champion earning an automatic berth in the NCAA tournament. It takes the games seriously--often, as Feinstein reveals, heartbreakingly so--even if it doesn't necessarily play to ACC, SEC, Big 10, and Pac-10 standards. Feinstein's interviewing, skillful as ever, brings the players, coaches, and administrators of the colleges in this league to full form, making *The Last Amateurs* a rarity among sports books--a smart volume about smart people with their heads and priorities pointed in the right direction. Like the conference itself, it's in a league of its own. --Jeff Silverman --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Army, Navy, Lafayette, Lehigh, Bucknell, Holy Cross and Colgate: these seven colleges make up the Patriot League, basketball's smallest Division I conference. In this book, NPR commentator and bestselling sportswriter Feinstein (*A Season on the Brink*, *The Majors*, etc.) gives an exhaustive account of the Patriot League's 1999-2000 season. He illustrates that exciting basketball can be played in front of crowds that can be as small as 1,000 and that rivalries such as Lafayette-Lehigh can be just as intense as those played by colleges in major conferences on national television. But Feinstein's intent is to do more than just provide details about the year's important games; he uses the Patriot League as an example of "what college sports are supposed to be about." Feinstein maintains that the conference's members are among the few colleges that can call their players 'student-athletes' with a straight face. Patriot League colleges hold athletes to rigorous entrance and academic standards and most scholarships are offered on a need-basis (although some schools are giving a limited number of basketball scholarships). Moreover, players regularly attend class since they are smart enough to know that there is little chance they will be playing ball at the professional level after graduation. Feinstein's portraits of these players and their coaches, his exploration of why they stay in the game and their encounters playing against soon-to-be-pro athletes of other teams bring an unusual emotional depth to this accountDwhich, like Feinstein's earlier books, should make a run toward, or on, the lists. (Nov.) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

According to LinkedIn, Chris Spitler is General Counsel and a Senior Vice-President at Nordea Bank. Pat Campolieta is an Advancement Officer at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Steve Aylsworth is the CEO of JetLux Hotels. These men, now in their mid- and late-30s, were featured in John Feinstein's 2001 book, *The Last Amateurs: Playing for Glory and Honor in Division I College Basketball*. Feinstein is a prolific chronicler of the American sporting life, having authored well written and easy to read books on everything from the Army-Navy football game and the Baltimore Ravens to the PGA Tour and Bob Knight. If I were to attempt to read every one of Feinstein's books, I might have to live to age 107. The organization of *The Last Amateurs* is familiar and easy to follow. Feinstein summarizes a Patriot League men's college basketball season, highlighting the high and low points and crafting uncritical profiles of head coaches and players. Although a Season in Review concept is a common framework for a work of sports non-fiction, Feinstein's literary talent sets *The Last Amateurs* apart from most jock/sportswriter diaries. Since the publication of *The Last Amateurs*, the Patriot League has expanded from seven to ten teams, adding Loyola (Maryland), American and Boston University. Athletic scholarships are now available to basketball players attending Patriot League colleges. But the qualities that set the Patriot League apart from the pack remain intact. Most Patriot League games were (and still are) played before crowds of less than 1,500. The ESPN cameras are at seemingly every game on the Division I schedule, except the ones involving Patriot League schools. And most of the players, genuine scholar-athletes, are majoring in substantive disciplines, courses of study that will lead to something beyond a ten-day contract with the Orlando Magic. For Spitler, Campolieta and Aylsworth, college basketball was a minor item on life's resume, a stepping stone to what one hopes are rich and fulfilling lives.

Looking at college basketball in an age when winning at all costs is the norm in Division I. A good indictment of the major basketball schools and their hunger for the money that comes from winning. There is a better way to fund education.

Feinstein has made a career selecting specific sports stories for in-depth analysis and a subsequent book. This time the story is a lowly Division 1 basketball conference that was formed under the premise of not issuing scholarships, therefore the title of the book. This book is at its best examining personal stories of individual players. How they got here, family issues effecting college educations, and the personal motivation that keeps kids playing basketball without significant

minutes or monetary reward are covered in detail with brilliance. Of course, the most famous is the worst player on the worst team in the worst conference in Division 1a basketball who uses that as a pick-up line. But many more stories are just as funny or touching including the stories of the coaches. The author is at his best telling these individual stories or commenting on how these true amateurs play for the challenge of competitive sports. You find yourself wishing all college sports could go back to true students who are athletes. Where the author failed was in overlaying these stories and moral questions around the complete season covering all the teams. There are just too many names and too many teams to keep track of. My first thought was that he should have had a diagram page in the center section showing the players on each team and where they finished the year. But that might not have cured the problem. Maybe he should have selected a couple of teams and overlayed their seasons with short stories of the other teams as they were played. Or maybe he should have written more in short story form with each chapter covering a team. Irrespective, it's just too much data for a reader looking for enjoyment. I do recommend this book and found the good outweighs the bad. Just be forewarned of the confusion, particularly in the middle of the book. As a matter of disclosure, I did not attend nor have any interest in any of the colleges mentioned in the book as many previous readers have had.

After hearing My Feinstein discuss this book on The Jim Rome show, I decided to give it a chance. Overall, I enjoyed reading about life in the Patriot League during the 2000 basketball season. The only problems that I had with the book is that it tries to cover so much. An entire season, 7 teams, coaches, players, and as a result, I was disappointed that I did not get a more in depth look at some of the players and coaches. I felt that this was a series of magazine bios on the coaches interspaced with descriptions of the games. I did like the book and if you are interested in basketball and a fan. This book will take you into a world where the kids play because they love the game, knowing there is pretty much no chance they will make a living from basketball. If you like Feinstein (I'm reading my second), pick this up. You won't be disappointed.

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