



## The Best American Sports Writing of the Century

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**The Best American Sports Writing of the Century** From Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

Pulitzer Prize-winning historian David Halberstam selects the fifty best pieces of sports writing of this century. The Best American Sports Writing of the Century showcases the best sports journalists of the twentieth century, from Jimmy Cannon, Red Smith, William Mack, Gary Smith, and Frank Deford to A. J. Liebling, Tom Wolfe, and Hunter S. Thompson, and includes such classics as "What Do You Think of Ted Williams Now?" by Richard Ben Cramer, "Louis Knocks Out Schmeling" by Bob Considine, and "The Rocky Road of Pistol Pete" by W. C. Heinz. This outstanding collection captures not only the century's greatest moments in baseball, boxing, horseracing, golf, and tennis, but some of the finest writing of our time. Guest editor David Halberstam is the author of *The Reckoning*, *The Summer of Forty-Nine*, *The Breaks of the Game*, and, most recently, *The Children*. Series editor Glenn Stout has written biographies of Joe DiMaggio, Ted Williams, and Jackie Robinson.

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

Given the overall vigor and volume of sports writing in America throughout the 20th century, the idea of compiling a single collection dubbed the "best" requires a daring balancing act of boldness and delicacy. And that's just what it is. Sports fans--but why limit this sparkling, spirited, passionate prose to just sports fans?--will revel in the equilibrium of David Halberstam's and Glenn Stout's wide range of selections. Their tribute to the knights of the keyboards is Hall of Fame-level from cover to cover.

Halberstam and Stout don't waste any time. They lead off with one of the great tours de force of American nonfiction, Gay Talese's stunningly poignant, 1966 profile of a moody Joe DiMaggio, "The Silent Season of a Hero." Then, before you can finish digesting it, they loudly switch gears to Tom Wolfe's "The Last American Hero," a razzle-dazzle look at Junior Johnson and the world of stock-car racing. By the time *Best* takes the checkered flag nearly 800 pages later, it has covered a remarkably rich and varied course that runs through the pens of such remarkable talents as Grantland Rice, Red Smith, Frank Deford, W.C. Heinz, Jim Murray, Murray Kempton, Ring Lardner, John Lardner, Jimmy Breslin, Al Stump, John Updike, John McPhee, Hunter Thompson, Norman Mailer, Jon Krakauer, Tom Boswell, Roger Angell, and David Remnick. Whew!

Like the best sportswriting, of course, *Best* is much more than fun and games, though there's plenty of that in its pages. *Best* is history captured on the fly through the games we play and the memorable players--Jackie Robinson, Joe Louis, Mohammad Ali, Secretariat, Ty Cobb, Babe Ruth, Red Grange--who play them. From selection to selection, writes Halberstam in his introduction, "we watch the country change." Certainly, sports--and sportswriting--have provided America a marvelous box seat for the contemplation of its own metamorphoses. --Jeff Silverman

#### From Publishers Weekly

Stout, editor of the Best American Sports Writing series since its inception nine years ago, and Halberstam, author most recently of *Playing for Keeps*, a biography of Michael Jordan (Forecasts, Jan. 18), have compiled a strong collection that will send readers on a captivating trip through the diversity of styles and subjects that developed as sports became big business and big news. Theres the direct address of Bob Considine (Listen to this buddy, for it comes from a guy whose palms are still wet, from Louis Knocks Out Schmeling) and the unique voice of Tom Wolfe (Ggghhzzzzzzeeeeong! from The Last American Hero, about racecar driver Junior Johnson). Although there are pieces about mountain climbing, tennis and chess, fully half of the selections are about two sports: baseball and boxing. The book begins with a Best of the Best section led by Gay Taleses 1966 profile of Joe DiMaggio, The Silent Season of a Hero. In the next two sections (which encompass deadline articles, columns, features and longer works), the strongest pieces, following Taleses lead, are penetrating profiles of the famous and difficult (e.g., Richard Ben Cramer on Ted Williams)as well as the largely forgotten (a run-of-the-mill boxer named Bummy Davis). The final section is a special six-piece tribute to man who himself claimed to be the best of the best Muhammad Ali.

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#### From Library Journal

YA-Only 100 years ago, sports writing did not even exist. Stout makes this point in the foreword, where he notes that athletic events, if covered at all by newspapers, were reviewed as performances by theater critics. Today, some of the very best writers of any kind have turned to sports for subject matter. Stout and

Halberstam have selected the best of the best for this centennial volume. And what an all-star lineup it is. Teenagers who were born long after most of the subjects of these articles were active will still recognize the timeless legends: Babe Ruth, Red Grange, Jim Thorpe, Joe DiMaggio. Many of these selections require no former knowledge: readers can fully enjoy Tom Wolfe's profile of Junior Johnson without any familiarity with stock-car racing; nor is knowledge of chess necessary for a full appreciation of Brad Darrach's account of super eccentric Bobby Fischer. Some of the most memorable writings come from newspapermen on tight deadlines: Jim Murray, en route to Zaire for the heavyweight title fight in 1974, wrote, "All right, my good man, hand me my jodhpurs and pith helmet and polish my monocle...Fire up the African Queen." The victor of that bout is the subject of the book's final, six-piece section, "The One and Only," Muhammad Ali. A fat volume of great writing for all collections.

*Robert Saunderson, Berkeley Public Library, CA*

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**Linda Thomas:**

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