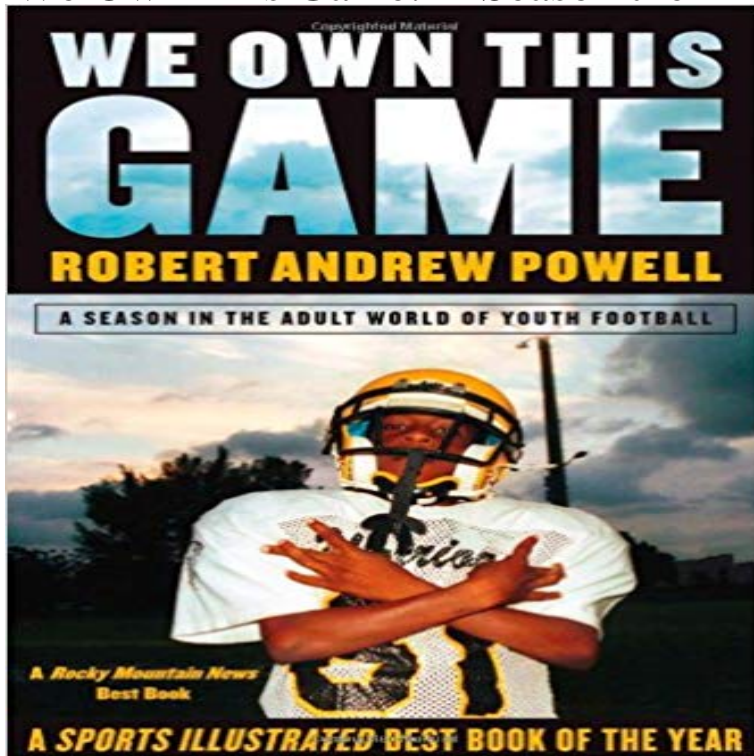


We Own This Game: A Season the in the Adult World of Youth Football



Although its participants are still in grade school, Pop Warner football is serious business in Miami, where local teams routinely advance to the national championships. Games draw thousands of fans; recruiters vie for nascent talent; drug dealers and rap stars bankroll teams; and the stakes are so high that games sometimes end in gunshots. In America's poorest city, troubled parents dream of NFL stardom for children who long only for a week in Disney World at the Pop Warner Super Bowl. In 2001, journalist Robert Andrew Powell spent a year following two young teams through rollercoaster seasons. The Liberty City Warriors, former national champs, will suffer the team's first-ever losing season. The inner-city kids of the Palmetto Raiders, undefeated for two straight years, are rewarded for good play with limo rides and steak dinners. But their flamboyant coach (the Darth Vader of youth football) will be humbled by defeat in a down-to-the-wire playoff game. TITLE OF BOOK is an inside-the-huddle look into a world of innocence and corruption, where every kickoff bares political, social, and racial implications. By an award-winning journalist whose work has appeared in *The Best American Sports Writing*, it is an unforgettable drama that shows us just what it is to win and to lose in America. INTRODUCTION A portrait of Miami, a city whose government, even after race riots which crippled the black community in the 80s, serves the interest mostly of the Cuban-American constituency and has been rocked by various political scandals (bribery, fiscal mismanagement, etc.). The author tells how he witnessed inner-city blacks find hope and identity during a high school football semifinal that was attended by tens of thousands. He takes a newspaper assignment covering Pop Warner football games and sees much he admires (a

depressed community proud that its boys could do something better than anyone else) but also the corruption of sport at its infancy (recruiting, fans assaulting the coach after the team's only loss, parents living through their kids, gambling, etc.). He quits his job to cover a season of Pop Warner, from the first day to the last game, attending every single season and game of the 95-pound Gwen Cherry Bulls, whose coach is dubbed the Darth Vader of Pop Warner. Prologue Registration day. Coach Brian Johnson of the Liberty City Warriors is introduced as he prints out ridiculously complicated game strategies for his team, based on the Georgia Southern Eagles game plans. It is his first year as head coach and he is determined to prove himself. I wouldn't be a man if I didn't aspire to run my own team. We're introduced to the Darth Vader of Pop Warner Raul Campos, the ostentatious coach of the 110-pound Palmetto Raiders, who is editing a video hyping his team as the greatest of all time, winners of back-to-back national championships at Disney World Sport Center, undefeated in the last 2 seasons. We're introduced to Diamond Pless, a young kid whose uncle was confined to a wheelchair after a shooting with a rival drug dealer, and who is now helping his uncle live his dream of NFL superstardom vicariously. We're introduced to Mark Peterson, the head of the league who tries without much success to discourage the recruitment of black inner city players to suburban ballparks, and is still torn over last year's national championship, where a Suniland team made up mostly of recruits won 56-6. The coach lost his job because he ran up the store, but is suing to be reinstated. CHAPTER ONE: First Practice The first practice, plus a history of Pop Warner football, the largest youth football league in America, started in 1929 in Philly to prevent youth crime and eventually to over 6,000 teams nationally competing to play in the national champion at Disney World. CHAPTER TWO: Liberty City A tour of Liberty City past the wealthy

enclaves of Miami and the poverty of Little Havana is a black neighborhood torn by race riots in the 80s and gang-related assassinations in the 90s. The neighborhood grew out of a black ghetto called Nigger Town which eventually became a progressive experimental black-only community named Knight Manor until a highway ran through it and tore the neighborhood apart. This is wear porno rapper Luther Campbell of 2 Live Crew comes from, who helped found the Liberty City program. Since then, the Warriors have won city championships in 7 of 8 weight divisions and have spawned other all-black parks.

CHAPTER THREE: CAMPOS Inside the home of the Cuban exile turned real estate wizard Coach Campos, who is hated and called a cracker and takes his players to games in chartered motor coaches and used to take them in Hummer limos. After being banned from another Pop Warner team, Campos took over the Palmetto team comprised mostly of white suburban kids and replaced them with mostly black players recruited from West Perrine via varsity letter jackets, steak dinnnnnnners, etc.

CHAPTER FOUR: DIAMOND Diamonds mom tries to petition for him to get a larger role on the team, but Diamond doesnt show much promise. Diamonds uncle Durell describes his gun injury.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUNILAND Were introduced to Phillip, whose father is dead from AIDS and whose HIV+ mothers behavior is erratic because of drugs. He is often left to his own devices. He sees football as his way out. Were introduced to the Suniland Devils, a suburban team comprised of recruited back players whose coach Gator Rebhan was banned after he ran up the score in a championship game. Rebhan thinks the League is jealous because he took a white ballpark and made it successful.

CHAPTER SIX: GOULDS The history of the Railroad Shop, a black settlement that developed nearly a century ago, was condemned by the city, but eventually turned black again. Now Goulds is black and poor. In their first game, Liberty City loses to Goulds, with

Coach Johnsons playbook proving way too complex for the pee wees.CHAPTER SEVEN: SEPTEMBER 11Warriors lose their second game. News of 9/11 comes, but Florida is very removed from the goings-on in NYC and Washington. The coaches convene at the field despite cancelled games and try to make sense of things.CHAPTER EIGHT: McADOOWere introduced to shadowy figure named McAdoo, who takes care of high school and college players in vague ways. Hes a street agent, of which every major college sports program has at least one. They operate under the radar, even going so far as to buy cars for young players even though he has no traceable source of income besides selling watermelons and gambling. He points out all of the players he raised rappers, NFL players, etc. McAdoos cash flow is supplemented by his relationships with some of Liberty Citys more prominent entrepreneurs, including drug dealers and gang members. McAdoo has switched his focus from encouraging kids to go into football to encouraging them to read.CHAPTER NINE: LIBERTY CITY AT PALMETTOLiberty City is now 1-4 and their chances at the championship are slipping. A player is hit hard and has to go to the hospital in an ambulance. Coach Johnson is questioning why he even bothers.CHAPTER ELEVEN: PLEXThe story of drug-related gang violence in Liberty City. Gang members bet up to \$10,000 and intimidated coaches and player. Diamonds father-in-law Plex was arrested for a murder associated with protecting the distribution channels of a crack laboratory. He is serving 5 life sentences.CHAPTER ELEVEN: ELECTIONThe Elian Gonzalez debacle, and how it further turned the black community against the Cubans. The Warriors win a game.CHAPTER THIRTEEN: THE GAMEA story about a legendary street game decades ago between a group of white kids and black kids. The black kids

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