



Smithsonian Institution

MUSEUM on Main Street

Hometown Teams: How Sports Shape America **Young Adult Reading List**

Chabon, Michael. *Summerland*. Hyperion Books for Children. 2002. 492 pages.

This age old fantasy of good and evil is enjoyed by young and old alike. Ethan Feld, a self-described “really bad ball player”, is recruited by a 100-year-old scout called Mr. Chiron "Ringfinger" Brown. Ethan, his determined friend Jennifer T. Rideout, and other heroes are needed to help fairies save their world from eradication. Their journey involves a lot of baseball, but also encounters with giants, bat-winged goblins, and sea monsters to save the Summerlands, and the world.

Crutcher, Christopher. *Athletic Shorts: Six Short Stories*. Greenwillow Books. 1998. Reprint 2002, 208 pages.

If the stereotype of the "bonehead jock" is ever to be defeated, it will be at Crutcher's hands. In these six short stories, he and his athlete protagonists take on such weighty issues as racism, homophobia, sexism and the teenager's essential task of coming to terms with his parents. At the same time the author makes the world of sports compelling enough to engage even the most sedentary readers. Crutcher is a prolific YA writer with several books revolving around sports. Three of the stories here revolve around characters featured in other Crutcher books. The stories' locales - mostly small towns in Montana and Idaho - make a satisfying change from the well-known big cities and stereotypical suburbs where so many YA novels are set.

Crutcher, Christopher. *Staying Fat For Sarah Byrnes*. Greenwillow Book. 2003. 304 pages.

This has been recognized by the American Library Association as a "Best of the Best Books for Young Adults". Sarah Byrnes and Eric have been friends for years. When they were children, his weight and her terrible scars made them both outcasts. Later, although swimming slimmed Eric, she stayed his closest friend. Now Sarah Byrnes — the smartest, toughest person Eric has ever known — sits silent in a hospital. Eric must uncover the terrible secret she's hiding, before its dark currents pull them both under.

Grisham, John. *Playing for Pizza*. Dell. Reprint 2012. 320 pages.

Rick Dockery is the third-string quarterback for the Cleveland Browns. In the AFC Championship game Rick provides what is arguably the worst single performance in the history of the NFL. Overnight, he becomes a national laughingstock—and is immediately cut by the Browns and shunned by all other teams. But all Rick knows is football, and he insists that his agent find him a new team. Against enormous odds, Rick finally gets a job—as the *starting* quarterback for the Mighty Panthers . . . of Parma, Italy. The Parma Panthers desperately want a former NFL player—and now they've got Rick, who



knows nothing about Parma (not even where it is) and doesn't speak a word of Italian. To say that Italy holds a few surprises for Dockery would be something of an understatement.

Kinsella, W.P. *Shoeless Joe*. Mariner Books. 1999. 272 pages.

W. P. Kinsella plays with both myth and fantasy in his lyrical novel, which was adapted into the enormously popular movie, *Field of Dreams* (1989). It begins with the magic of a godlike voice in a cornfield, and ends with the magic of a son playing catch with the ghost of his father. Like Ring Lardner and Bernard Malamud before him, Kinsella spins baseball as backdrop and metaphor, and, like his predecessors, uses the game to tell us a little something more about who we are and what we need.

Levenkron, Steven. *The Luckiest Girl in the World: A Young Skater Battles her Self-Destructive Impulses*. Penguin Books. 1998. 188 pages.

Katie Roskova seems to have everything: she's pretty, popular, smart, and has Olympic-class skating talent.. But is there another side to Katie? With her trouble dealing with the mounting pressures of her young life and feeling there was no other means of expression available to her, she reacts to her overbearing mother, her absent father, her unforgiving schedule, and her oblivious classmates by turning her self-doubt into self-hatred - and into self-mutilation.

Lupica, Mike. *Heat*. Puffin. Reprint 2007. 240 pages.

Mike Lupica is one of the most prominent sportswriters in America. Today he is a syndicated columnist for the New York Daily News. He is a novelist and non-fiction writer, co-authoring several sports biographies and writing books for children and young adults. *Heat* and *Travel Team* listed below are just two selections. All offer a contemporary look at the complicated lives of today's youth and sports. In *Heat* twelve-year-old Michael Arroyo lives in the shadows of Yankee Stadium, home of his heroes, but a place that might as well be on a different continent since he can't afford to see the inside. He also lives in the shadows of his Bronx neighborhood, hiding from the bill collectors and the officials who would separate him from his seventeen-year-old brother if they knew the two boys were living on their own. Baseball is Michael's only salvation, along with his dream of playing in the Little League World Series—until a rival accuses Michael of being older than the league limit. With no parents and a birth certificate that is stuck in his native Cuba, the shadows in Michael's life grow darker. But that is when heroes emerge, and for Michael, heroes don't come any bigger than the Yankees.

Lupica, Mike. *Travel Team*. Puffin. Reprint 2005. 288 pages.

Twelve-year-old Danny Walker may be the smallest kid on the basketball court—but don't tell him that. Because no one plays with more heart or court sense. But none of that matters when he is cut from his local travel team, the very same team his father led to national prominence as a boy. Danny's father, still smarting from his own troubles, knows Danny isn't the only kid who was cut for the wrong reason, and together, this washed-up former player and a bunch of never-say-die kids prove that the heart simply cannot be measured.



Stillitoe, Alan. *Loneliness of a Long Distance Runner*. Penguin. 1959.192 pages.

A British story that also lends itself nicely to the exhibition themes and is perhaps one of the most revered works of fiction in the twentieth-century, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* is a modern classic about integrity, courage, and bucking the system. Its title story recounts the story of a British reform school cross-country runner who seizes the perfect opportunity to defy the authority that governs his life. The collection expands even further to include other touching stories. *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* captured the voice of a generation, and its poignant and empowering life lessons that continue to captivate and entertain generations of readers.

Young Adult Non-Fiction

Bissinger, H.G. *Friday Night Lights: A Town, a Team, and a Dream*. DeCapo Press. 10th edition 2000. 400 pages.

This book profiles the racially divided and economically depressed city of Odessa, Texas and their heroic high school football team, The Permian High Panthers. In Odessa, as in much of the country, there is one night that unifies and gives the town something to live for: Friday Night. The Panthers have a big winning tradition in Texas high school football, but in this 1988 season, their superstar tailback suffers a career-ending injury in the first game of the season and hope is lost among citizens. The Panthers must rise from the ashes on their way to the championships, feeling like nothing like this might ever matter this much for the rest of their lives. This book inspires the 2004 film by the same name and a spin-off TV series.

Blais, Madeleine. *In These Girls, Hope is a Muscle*. Grand Central Publishing. 1994, Reissued 1996. 272 pages.

Pulitzer Prize-winner Madeleine Blais follows the Amherst High, MA girls basketball team-the Lady Hurricanes-in the 1992-93 season, from game one on December 15 to the final game on March 16, when they all but obliterated Haverhill, 74-36, to win the state championship. While this is the story of well-bred, upper-middle class, genteel girls who learned to be tough, it is also a picture of a changing period in American sports history, when a town rallied around its female athletes in a way that had previously been reserved for males.

McElwain, Jason “J-Mac” with Paisner, Daniel. *The Game of My Life: A True Story of Challenge, Triumph, and Growing Up Autistic*. New American Library – a Division of Penguin Group; 2008. 243 pages.

This is Jason “J-Mac” McElwain's inspiring first-person account of the challenges of growing up autistic – not only for himself but his family. In 2006 “J-Mac” was the manager for the Greece (NY) Athena Trojans – picking up towels, fetching water and motivating the team during practice. To be allowed to dress for



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the final game – and sit along side of his team – was quite a thrill. With four minutes and nineteen seconds left on the clock the coach sent McElwain in the game. Not only did he score twenty points but he set a school record scoring six-three pointers! Soon he found himself on the *Today Show*, *Oprah*, won an *ESPY Award* and met the president.

Ware, Susan. *Game, Set, Match: Billie Jean King and the Revolution of Women's Sports*. University of North Carolina Press. 2011. 296 pages.

When Billie Jean King trounced Bobby Riggs in tennis' Battle of the Sexes in 1973, she placed sports squarely at the center of a national debate about gender equity. In this winning combination of biography and history, Susan Ware argues that King's challenge to sexism, the supportive climate of second-wave feminism, and the legislative clout of Title IX sparked a women's sports revolution in the 1970's that fundamentally reshaped American society. While King did not single-handedly cause the revolution in women's sports, she quickly became one of its most enduring symbols, as did Title IX, a federal law that was initially passed in 1972 to attack sex discrimination in educational institutions but had its greatest impact by opening opportunities for women in sports.