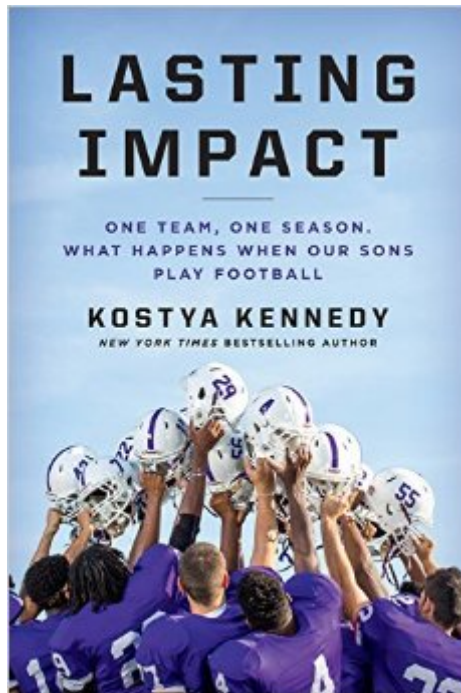


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Lasting Impact: One Team, One Season. What Happens When Our Sons Play Football



Synopsis

New York Times bestselling author Kostya Kennedy sets this captivating, character-rich story against the back-drop of one of the most pressing questions in sports: Should we let our sons play football? At the high end of America's most popular game is the glittering NFL, a fan-stoked money machine and also an opaque enterprise under scrutiny for the physical dangers imposed on its players. Then there's high school football, unrivaled for the crucial life lessons it imparts-discipline, leadership, cooperation, humility, perseverance-yet also a brain-rattling, bone-breaking game whose consequences are at best misunderstood, and, at the very worst, deadly. What is the parent of a young athlete to make of that?The New Rochelle High School team in suburban New York is like many across the country: a source of civic pride, a manhood workshop for a revered coach and an emotional proving ground for boys of widely different backgrounds. In the fall of 2014, New Rochelle's season unfolded alongside watershed NFL head injury revelations and domestic abuse cases (remember Ray Rice?), as well as fatalities on nearby fields.The dramatic story of that season, for players, parents and coaches, underscores fundamental questions. Are football's inherent risks so great that the sport may not survive as we know it? Or are those risks worth the rewards that the game continues to bestow, and that can stay with a young man for a lifetime?

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Customer Reviews

Coincidentally I got this book to review shortly after I'd finished *Eat My Schwartz*, by Geoff and Mitch Schwartz. The Schwartz brothers paint a completely different picture of NFL life. They point out that a very small percentage of football players are involved in domestic violence. They say nothing about injuries. They talk about being friends with their teammates who cook together with their

families. Kennedy's book is almost exactly the opposite. *Lasting Impact* follows a season of New Rochelle High School, in one of the more exclusive suburbs in the US, with a diverse, talented student body. In some ways, the book resembles other "reporter follows the team" books. But Kennedy also devotes considerable space to controversial topics, particularly concussions and domestic violence. Ray Rice was a New Rochelle graduate - a superstar player who also did a lot of good for the community when he went to the NFL. When he was caught on video in a particularly disturbing domestic violence episode, the team and the school responded emotionally. There were questions of removing his jersey from display cases. Kennedy points to a higher incidence of violence in football compared to other sports, listing specific examples of player involvement. Do these numbers show that football attracts or encourages this behavior? Or do they compare favorably with the general population, and perhaps other sports attract especially kind, gentle players? Kennedy provides considerable data and background on the subject of concussions. He shares examples of New Rochelle players who are motivated to stay in the game and who brush off the "seeing stars" moments. Who wants to give up playing time? Who wants to appear weak?

The sport of football has been under the microscope for several months due to issues on many fronts: domestic violence incidents involving professional players, the overall culture of the game and the safety of the players' long-term health due to the concerns about the number of concussions suffered. All of those topics and more are explored in this excellent book on a high school football team by Kostya Kennedy. The book takes the reader through the 2014 football season of New Rochelle High School, a New York City suburban school district. The area is a melting pot of all levels of affluence, of various races and various family dynamics. The football program, led by coach Lou DiRienzo, is one of the more successful teams for many years. The players are proud to be wearing the Huguenots jersey and many come back to visit. One of these former players, Ray Rice, came back to visit during that 2014 season when he was the flashpoint of the issue of domestic violence in professional football. This section of the book was a good example of the main characteristic of this book that I thought made it an excellent read: it was fair, free of inflammatory talking points and explained the issue in a thorough manner. Concerns about player safety and concussions are also explored from the point of view of coaches, players and parents. The culture of the game will make players not want to suggest that anything is wrong with them physically. There is concussion treatment protocol that all teams must follow, but it relies on player self-reporting. Because of this, according to a quote in the book, "There may be as many concussions that go unrecognized as go recognized on the football field."

LASTING IMPACT by Kostya Kennedy is a two fold story of following the 2014 football season at New Rochelle High School, located just north of New York City. It is also a study of what high school football means to people: to the players, the coaches, the parents, the community and whether football is a good thing for young men to be participating in such a violent sport and comparable to other high school sports, a dangerous game. Kennedy heavily considers concussions, looking at how they are diagnosed, what current and former players really think about the concussion protocols that are in place, and is it an acceptable sacrifice to play football despite the potential repercussions of repeated head injury. The New Rochelle team is a likable bunch. Kennedy spends time writing about many of them, where they come from, and what their aspirations are. They all love their coach, Lou DiRienzo, who has been at the high school for years and is one of those unique coaches who, while wanting to win, seems to relish even more the idea of team; that if these young men come together and fully commit to being a singular unit, called the New Rochelle football team, that they can accomplish anything. Kennedy was forming this book during a pivotal time in the NFL, and since Ray Rice is a New Rochelle alumni and some of the revelations of his personal life were coming out during the 2014 season, the team, the school, and Rice intersected for a time and Kennedy's take from the coaches and the school's point of view was unique and different from how the public perceived it at the time.

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