

Synopsis

The dramatic story of how two legendary players burst on the scene in an NCAA championship that gave birth to modern basketball. Thirty years ago, college basketball was not the sport we know today. Few games were televised nationally and the NCAA tournament had just expanded from thirty-two to forty teams. Into this world came two exceptional players: Earvin "Magic" Johnson and Larry Bird. Though they played each other only once, in the 1979 NCAA finals, that meeting launched an epic rivalry, transformed the NCAA tournament into the multibillion-dollar event it is today, and laid the groundwork for the resurgence of the NBA. In *When March Went Mad*, Seth Davis recounts the dramatic story of the season leading up to that game, as Johnson's Michigan State Spartans and Bird's Indiana State Sycamores overcame long odds and great doubts that their unheralded teams could compete at the highest level. Davis also tells the stories of their remarkable coaches, Jud Heathcote and Bill Hodges—who were new to their schools but who set their own paths to build great teams—and he shows how tensions over race and class heightened the drama of the competition. When Magic and Bird squared off in Salt Lake City on March 26, 1979, the world took notice—to this day it remains the most watched basketball game in the history of television—and the sport we now know was born.

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Customer Reviews

In 1979, when I was at Ohio State University, the sports buzz was all about the Michigan State Spartans and their great player Earvin "Magic" Johnson, and a guy named Larry Bird who played for Indiana State. One team was undefeated, and the other was cutting a swath through the Big

Ten. But this was before (gasp!) cable TV in any but a primitive form. There was no ESPN. There was virtually no way to see these teams unless you scored tickets in person. And so it was that one of the great rivalries in sports history could barely be seen, much less analyzed by sports fans around the country. Only when Bird met Magic in that season's NCAA finals, could basketball fanatics really see not just what the fuss was all about, but the future of pro and college hoops. In "When March Went Mad," Seth Davis, a basketball analyst for CBS, tells the wildly entertaining tale of how NCAA basketball came out from behind the shadow of college football to become a sports juggernaut in its own right. Even in college, Johnson and Bird were basketball virtuosos, capable of bringing their teams up to whole different level. There was something new and different and even a little mysterious being played out in college hoops that year, which brought in its wake a new crop of superstars like Michael Jordan and college sports TV contracts generating literally billions of dollars a year. And it all started with Larry Bird and Magic Johnson. With excellent attention to detail, Davis tells the real story behind that storybook year, relating the ups and downs, the PR and game-day disasters, the come-from-behind victories, the challenges overcome almost daily by two teams who had been completely ignored pre-season by pundits and analysts.

In the Spring of 1979, there were two teams on an inevitable, collision course ~ perhaps more-so than any other two teams in the history of the NCAA tournament. The two teams were from the border states of Michigan & Indiana and both featured a superstar on their roster. For the Michigan State Spartans, it was Lansing's own Earvin "Magic" Johnson. For the Indiana State Sycamores, it was Larry Bird. The two players would have many things in common, as well as some notable differences. Larry was more of a pure scorer, while Magic was more of a "catalyst" for his team's offense. Both players would move on & have remarkable NBA careers where they would continue their rivalry from the national championship game. Both would even become NBA head coaches; Larry was highly successful with the Indiana Pacers, while Magic's short stint with the Lakers was disastrous. Personality wise, they could not be more different. Magic was gregarious and loved having a mic in front of his face. Larry, meanwhile, was diffident towards the media & preferred for the team as a whole to get the attention after victories rather than he personally. Magic always had a smile on his face, while Larry was known for his stoic expressions. Such is the backdrop of the present book, which gives the reader a "behind the scenes" narrative of the 1979 college basketball season which culminated in perhaps the single most important basketball game ever played. It still holds the record for the highest ratings, and it elevated the game of college basketball to unseen heights. It also indirectly rejuvenated the NBA, which at this time was very unpopular.

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