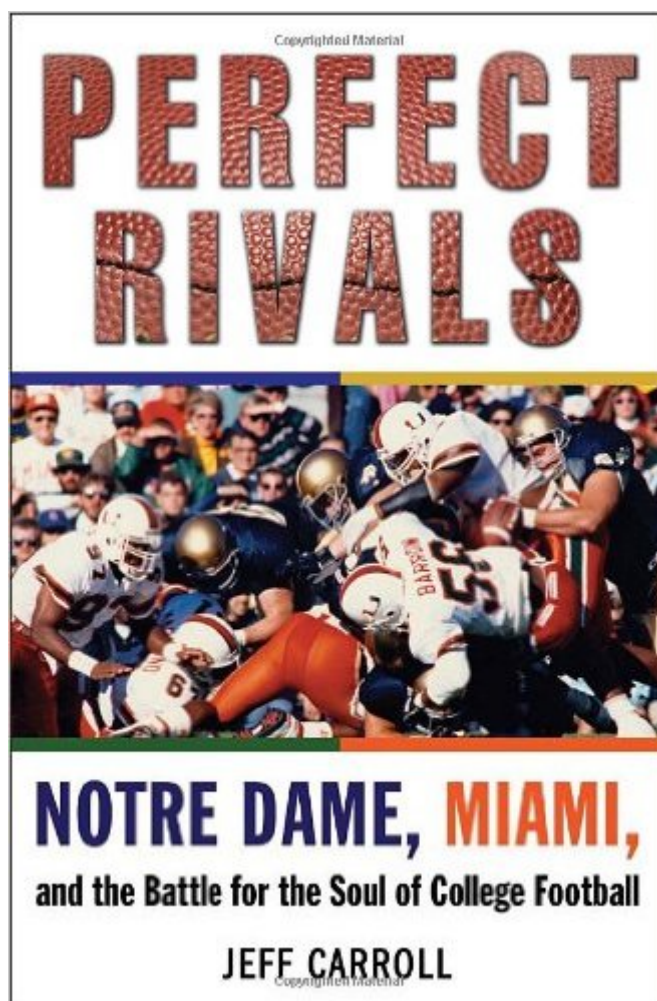


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Perfect Rivals: Notre Dame, Miami, And The Battle For The Soul Of College Football



Synopsis

College football is a sport of rivalries—and no two teams were ever more perfectly matched than the Miami Hurricanes and the Notre Dame Fighting Irish. In *Perfect Rivals*, award-winning sportswriter Jeff Carroll takes us inside the locker rooms and onto the gridiron, as two storied programs with very different cultures battle for national supremacy, school pride, and the soul of the game itself. Beginning with the Hurricanes' nationally televised 58–7 pasting of the Irish at the Orange Bowl in November 1985, the two teams faced each other five times over a six-year span. The last three of those games had national championship implications, as a resurgent Notre Dame sought to reclaim its historic preeminence against a faster, mouthier, more talented Miami squad notorious for trash-talking opponents, stalking out of pregame buffets, and wearing military fatigues on the team plane. The games were marked by heartbreaking finishes, disputed plays, and nasty onfield brawls. Adding fuel to the fire was a controversial slogan created by a Notre Dame student and picked up by the press—"Catholics vs. Convicts"—which served to heighten the cultural (and, some would say, racial) tension between the opposing schools. Carroll's fast-paced, up-close-and-personal narrative centers on a handful of colorful characters on both sides of the rivalry: the coaches, from dapper Jimmy Johnson to punctilious Lou Holtz, and the players, including Miami's Steve Walsh, a quiet Midwesterner and one-time Holtz recruit who defied the freewheeling Miami stereotype, and devout Baptist Tony Rice, only the second black quarterback in Notre Dame history, who defined the rivalry and decided the contests. Filled with you-are-there depictions of game action and insights drawn from Carroll's unfettered access to many of the major figures involved, *Perfect Rivals* is a vivid re-creation of one of the most entertaining eras in the history of college football.

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Customer Reviews

The rivalry between the University of Notre Dame and the University of Miami was college football's most intense, consequential, and controversial of the '80s, with the victor of the annual game going on to win the national championship each year from 1987 through 1989. With such high stakes riding on the outcome of each game, and with such bitter hatred engendered in each prideful camp for the other, the decade-long epic battle for college football supremacy waged by the Hurricanes and Irish provides an extremely compelling topic for a book. Unfortunately, Jeff Carroll fumbles the opportunity in what can only be described as a second-rate effort. The first part of the book ("Collision Course") traces the genesis of the rivalry, Miami's rise from perennial punching bag to college football supremacy under the direction of Howard Schnellenberger and Jimmy Johnson, and new Notre Dame head coach Lou Holtz's monumental effort to rebuild the Irish into a national power in the wake of the disastrous Gerry Faust era and a humiliating 58-7 loss to the Hurricanes in 1985. It moves along at a breezy, never-dull pace as it alternates between each side's narrative. More attention is given to the Notre Dame narrative (for example, entire Miami seasons are glossed over and the fabled 1987 Miami-Florida State game is mentioned only in passing as a "one-point victory" for the Hurricanes, while sometimes even nondescript Notre Dame games are given detailed summaries), but this is not intentional and probably simply a function of Carroll's background as a writer for the South Bend Tribune and greater familiarity with the Notre Dame program. The second section ("Catholics versus Convicts"), encompassing the period from 1988 through 1989, is where the book falls apart.

As other readers have said, the topic of this book is a GREAT idea. Miami was the team of the 80s and early 90s and basically overturned the traditional football establishment. Notre Dame was the old-school traditional program that wanted revenge and get back to the top. The first half of the book does a decent job of setting up / leading up to the showdown in 1988. I do wish Carroll spent a little more time on Miami and the types of players it had, etc. He gives a very detailed account of Holtz's arrival, Tony Rice, Chris Zorich, etc. and spends about half the time on Jimmy Johnson, Dennis Erickson, Steve Walsh and Craig Erickson. This leads me to the next point....Total bias in favor of Notre Dame. I thought this book was going to really dive into how close this rivalry was and how evenly matched they were in 1988. More importantly, I thought it was going to set up just how good

the 'Canes were back then and how ND was going to do anything to catch up. Instead, the 1987 game is completely glossed over, as is Miami's triumph of winning the national championship game. Ha, the 87 championship game against Oklahoma is summed up in about 1 page while Carroll spends pages upon pages on regular season games for ND. Other bias includes Gary's fumble (not even mentioning the student newspaper!), the "closeness" of the 89 game in which Miami completely outplayed ND in the second half (he makes it sound as if ND lost the game and Miami didn't win it), etc. Also, he goes on to mention numerous times how Miami's program never could withstand itself and that it was starting to crumble after they lost the 1990 game. Then, goes on to say in ONE PARAGRAPH, yes, one paragraph, that oh yeah, Miami went on to win the 1991 national title and lose the 1992 national title game.

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