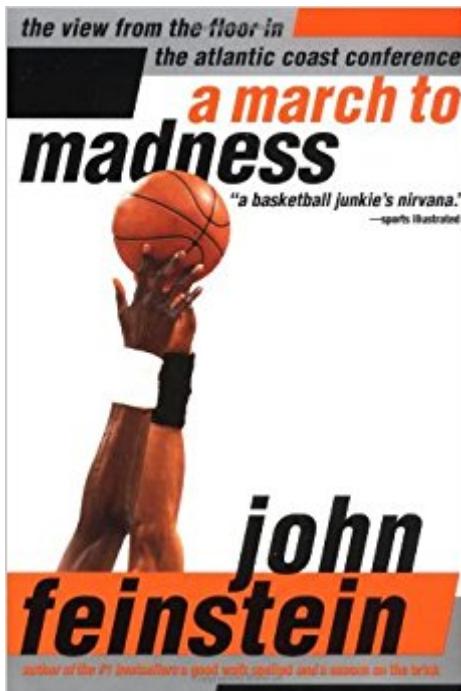


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A March To Madness: A View From The Floor In The Atlantic Coast Conference



Synopsis

It's the book in which America's favorite sportswriter returns to the arena of his most successful bestseller, *A Season on the Brink*. It's the book that takes us inside the intensely competitive Atlantic Coast Conference & paints a portrait of how college basketball is coached & played at the highest level. It's the book that takes us onto the courts, into the locker rooms, & inside the high-pressure world of the talented coaches who have helped make the ACC's nine colleges - Duke, North Carolina, North Carolina State, Clemson, Georgia Tech, Virginia, Maryland, Wake Forest, & Florida State - world-renowned for their championship basketball teams. The author's afterword to this edition will recap the ACC's current season & preview the 1998-99 rivalries.

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Customer Reviews

I grew up in the Southeast on a steady sports diet of ACC basketball and football, followed each team closely each year, and, of course, later attended an ACC school. I graduated in the spring of 1996 -- just a few months before the 1996-97 season Feinstein chronicles in this book began. So I thought I knew all about the ACC and its sundry characters. Boy was I wrong. Feinstein's insights and access showed me an entirely different side of the ACC world I only thought I knew. The spotlight here is on the coaches and we get to know most of them intimately -- their background, their fears, their expectations, their personal lives, their triumphs and failures. It's all fascinating stuff, although, frankly, I expected a little bit more about the players themselves. Instead, players like Tim Duncan and Vince Carter have mere bit parts in the background. But they were college players and I guess Feinstein really couldn't drag them into the commercial world of book writing. Since the focus of the book is on the coaches themselves, the amount of access each coach

gave Feinstein set the tone for the entire project. It is more than obvious that coaches like Duke's Mike Krzyzewski, Maryland's Gary Williams, Wake Forest's Dave Odom, Clemson's Rick Barnes, Virginia's Jeff Jones, and Florida State's Pat Kennedy gave Feinstein as much access and interview time as he wanted and they are covered thoroughly in the book. On the other hand, it's apparent NC State's Herb Sendek, Georgia Tech's Bobby Cremins, and, most importantly, North Carolina's Dean Smith didn't give Feinstein nearly as much time, access, and information as the others. Smith, in particular, is portrayed as an outside, shadowy figure and a pretty mean one at that.

...and certainly the best book on basketball I've read. Better for me than *A Season On the Brink* - better written, and the central characters are more sympathetic than Bobby Knight. But I'm a long-time ACC fan. The book gives you great perspective on life as a basketball coach: how hard it is to climb the ladder, how uncertain the job is, how coaches' success depends on recruiting great players. The best parts of this book are the portraits of the coaches and how they got where they are today. Stories about Bob Kennedy and Gary Williams getting into a screaming match at the scorers table as assistant coaches; Jim Valvano and Rick Pitino at basketball camps in the off-season; and so on. Really compelling stories about the basketball life, including comments on the toll it takes on coaches' marriages. The book has some drawbacks. For one, you almost need to be an ACC fan. I was already familiar with and interested in most of the characters in the book, but fans in other parts of the country may not be. Also, as time goes by and people move on out of the ACC, the book may become less and less relevant. All the players from that season are gone; many of the coaches too. I think only Herb Sendek, Dave Odom, Gary Williams, Mike Krz. are still coaching at those schools: gone are Rick Barnes, Pat Kennedy, Bobby Cremins, Jeff Jones, and of course El Deano. And the book really doesn't focus on the players at all: it's almost entirely about the coaches. But some of the criticisms made by other reviewers don't seem valid to me: (1) Duke - I thought Feinstein bent over backwards NOT to show a Duke bias. But Duke finished first in the league that year, Duke has been one of the dominant programs in the game, plus Feinstein had some compelling stuff about Duke.

I'm not a college hoops fan, but having come from the University of Connecticut (back when winning the NIT was a big deal for us), I figured I should try to read something about the sport that has come to define my alma mater. I chose well. No, UConn is not a part of the Atlantic Coast Conference, the subject of this season-long profile by John Feinstein. But Feinstein gives a solid appreciation for what college basketball is all about through the experiences of the coaches, players, refs, execs,

and fans active in the ACC, which Feinstein claims is perhaps the most competitive b-ball conference in Division 1, year in and out. "Let down just the slightest bit and you become instant roadkill," he writes. Feinstein gives you a sense of the different coaching styles at play here, from Dean Smith's traditional approach at North Carolina to Rick Barnes' cut-up quirkiness at Clemson to Dave Odom's huggy-bear avuncularity at Wake Forest. He relates tales about the history and folklore of the conference that make one feel like an instant Dick Vitale just from reading them, even if the terms "traveling" and "charging" make you flash on American Express. Most importantly, he writes a book that really opens up the world of college basketball to the more casual fan, or even curious non-fan. That's what I liked the book. I read it, relished it, and enjoyed it with practically no knowledge of the sport going in. The way Feinstein writes about how different refs call different fouls, for example, was both illuminating and entertaining reading. Feinstein also writes candidly about contracts, recruiting, marriages (failed and successful), burnout, death, and all the other factors that affect college coaches.

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