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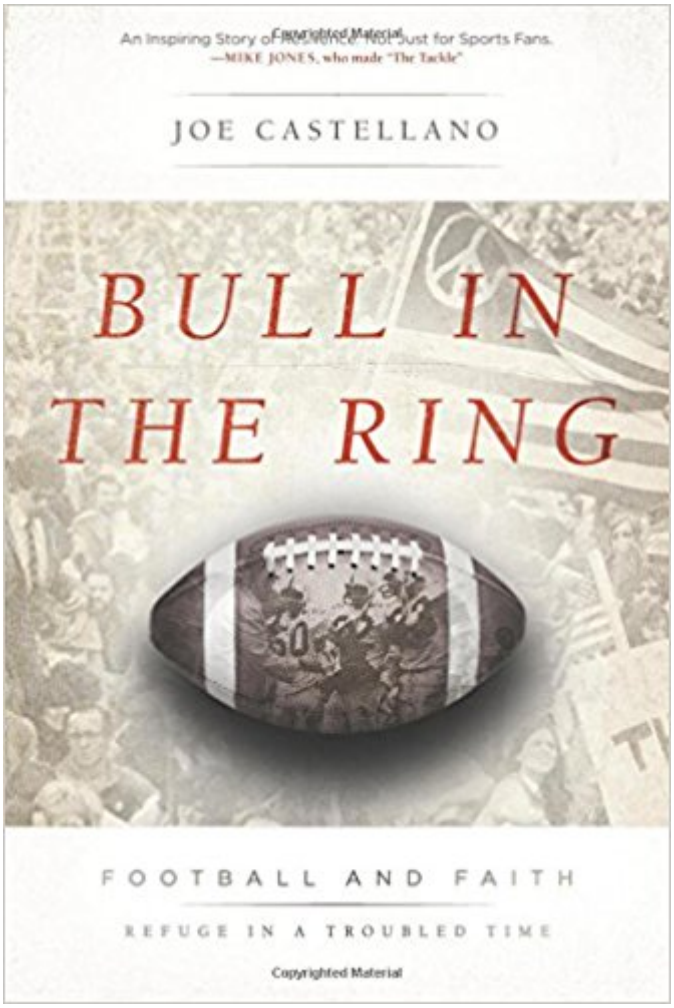
Bull In The Ring: Football And Faith: Refuge In A Troubled Time



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Synopsis

The thread of the book is an account of the 1970 Missouri large schools high school state football championship my St. Louis University High team won. We were unlikely champions: undersized, not very fast, no home field, high academic standards for admission, half our games against Top 10 teams in the state. We barely qualified for the four-team state playoff, we faced the heavily favored title game opponent having won our previous four games by an average of just 4.5 points, including a 14-13 victory over our archrival in front of 18,000 people at Busch Stadium. I was a center and linebacker, and one of the team captains.The story of the book, though, is how football and that championship season became a refuge for my classmates and me, young Baby Boomers whose great but naÃƒÂ ve ambition was tempered by the frightening, threatening social turmoil of the late 1960s. The Vietnam War was escalating, the Civil Rights Movement was exploding, college campuses were erupting in protest, and many of us were at war with our parents' generation. Adding to our drama, we suffered a very personal tragedy that shook us, just as the season and the school year began.Ã Â I tell this true story from the first person, and through the reminiscences of a handful of the key characters who were central to it, including our legendary head coach Paul Martel, who died in January 2016 at age 91. I conclude the book with reflections of what that season and accomplishment meant to us, particularly as we now face the final quarter of our lives. Educated by Jesuit priests, who challenged us to question, to commit to something, and to act, we pulled together in common purpose, at least for that season. Most of us were buoyed by our belief in each other, and by our faith in God. And, at least for me, I experienced life lessons that proved invaluable for what I was to become: a daily newspaper sportswriter and columnist, then a business executive, husband and father.true sports stories such as Remember the Titans, Hoosiers, Friday Night Lights, and One Shot at Forever (the story of the small-school Macon, Illinois baseball team that finished second in the 1971 Illinois baseball tournament), offer drama beyond the tension of high school competition on the fields and courts. This story provides plenty for an avid sports fan. But it, too, offers much more. I suspect Baby Boomers around the country, and readers of all ages, can relate to the way dreams evolve, become compromised or rationalized, and come to rest. And how hard-earned accomplishments, especially those boosted by the kind hand of an unseen power, provide meaning and comfort as we reflect on the impact we have made on the world. Among the characters: our best player, an earnest and unselfish athlete who had his best game in the state championship; our only African-American teammate, whose parents moved him to St. Louis to distance him from the racial turmoil in central Alabama in the mid-1960s; our biggest player, a character seemingly straight from Clair Bee's Chip Hilton stories; our quarterback, a

free-spirited genius who exasperated the coaches but pulled off heroic plays; an under-sized defensive end seemingly possessed by the spirit of his cherished older brother killed in Vietnam; and our Student Council secretary, an African-American who challenged us to confront society's racial issues and later revealed he is gay.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

An inspiring story of resilience. Not just for sports fans.-- Mike Jones, who made "The Tackle" At any level of sports, the most interesting teams take us on a ride through joy, sadness, tension, hilarity, unpredictability, disappointment, triumph and unexpected adventure. "Bull In The Ring" is a true story about a high school football team that did all of those things. Joe Castellano brings back memories of a turbulent time in America, and dives deeper than you'd expect into that murky and debatable area of how much games should truly matter in the bigger scheme of life. Also, there are anecdotes about a priest who shouted out football strategy in his sleep, a soccer team expatriate placekicker, a quarterback who liked to ignore the play calls of his crusty coach, and pep rallies led by a future advertising executive in an ant costume. Who wouldn't want to read a book about that?-- Mark Purdy, sports columnist, San Jose Mercury News and Bay Area News Group Joe Castellano did a wonderful job writing about teamwork, faith, self-discipline, leadership, life experiences, and lessons learned; how one is influenced by family, friends, teachers, coaches, experiences, national and world affairs; the issues of race, sexual orientation, the Vietnam war during that era; and the life-long impact one high school football season can have on the players. -- Francis Slay, longest-serving Mayor in the history of St. Louis (2001-17) The book captures so much of the

tension of the time -- the Vietnam War, the fight for civil rights, long hair, the generational turmoil. Yet one thing was clear -- we were lucky enough to be embraced by leaders who helped us grow up and allowed us to be part of something very special.-- Dan Flynn, CEO U.S. Soccer Federation, SLUH Class of 1973

Well-written and a great story!

Classmate Joe Castellano’s memoir of a championship season is a highly personal account of the 1970 Missouri High School football title from the perspective of the winning team’s center and co-captain. Thoroughly researched and deftly drafted, this book goes far beyond the anecdotes and playlists usually found in the genre to paint a moving portrait of a faculty, team, class and friends bound together by an appreciation of the values and experiences we shared.One generation removed from the WWII combatants, the contestants were completing their formative years facing the turmoil of the period, the prospect of the impending draft, and a country torn by increasing income inequality and racial and inter-generational strife. The author finds himself thrust into sometimes competing leadership roles, as both team captain and student body president while coping with the academic pressures of a Jesuit education.Using an externally focused story-telling style, heavy on context and light on introspection, Castellano implicitly reveals the leadership skills and methods that were so effective in shaping a team and a senior class that had not shown particular promise up to that point. Of course, he did not do this alone. The Jesuits -- his "Black Robes" -- parents and even older brothers and their ghosts hover around the action like gods encircling the Trojan plains. A central conflict between the spirited team and its rule-bound but brilliant head coach unfolds throughout, reaching resolution some 40 years later as coach and captain reunite and reflect.Such is leadership that Castellano bares his vulnerability in seeking out the advise of Fr. O’Brien, the humble and enigmatic spiritual leader of the community. We learn of an impromptu conversation following the violent death of a classmate just as the story of the championship season begins. Castellano: "What is the point?"O’Brien: "Well you can give up if you want." Then, "It’s sometimes hard to go on."The rest is left to the imagination, but we know that the student needs to talk and finds a sympathetic, wise and caring elder who provides no answers, only (and importantly) reflection.Football may be the object of the narrative, but man’s search for meaning through the daily struggles of life is the subject.This is a book rich in context and surprisingly deep in feeling. Through its exploration of the particulars of a single football season, it achieves a universality reached by only the best non-fiction writers.

As a former Jr. Bill football player, I expected to encounter a rather parochial, albeit, entertaining, review of the author’s experiences on the dreaded, arid, grassless, "ignominious pit of hell

"Bull In The Ring" goes beyond football. It contains vivid elements of humor, tragedy, and triumph. Joe Castellano has captured, in rich detail, a time and place that evokes bittersweet memories, yet inspires us with its timeless yard markers of success--sweat, sacrifice, and brotherhood--that a bunch of guys used to beat the odds.Tim Flemingauthor of "The President’s Mortician"

Stayed up late last night and finished the Bull in the Ring. If I were a journalist or critic I would now write some wonderful and inspiring words of praise, but since that is not the case these are my thoughts:ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â¢ Inspiring (especially in these troubled and divided times our nation is facing)ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â¢ A story of enduring and epic friendshipsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â¢ A story of leadership and self-discipline that will influence those who readÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â¢ A story of synergismÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â¦ something needed in our world todayÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â¢ A story that took place in turbulent times earlier in our lives but whose dates could be changed to our present day.This book captivated me, and like any satisfying and commendable book, left me somewhat saddened that it was over.

I thoroughly enjoyed the book. . Although my high school years were a decade earlier than the author’s the book elicited many memories of my experiences in the 50’s and 60’s. The author’s memoir is an excellent snapshot of an interesting and turbulent time in both his life and in the history of our country.. His relationship with his contemporaries , with his highly disciplined teachers, and with an extraordinary coach were interesting and insightful. . This book is far more than the story of a championship season. I would recommend this book. . ..

For anyone born a baby boomer and especially those born in Missouri particularly the Saint Louis region, this book is a great story about life’s experiences during the 1960’s and early 70’s. The author draws you in with things you may or may not have forgotten like Kent State, Woodstock and of course the Vietnam War. He uses music of the times in his analogies when referencing the death of a close friend, "Has anyone here seen my old friend Ed" from Abraham, Martin and John. This is just one analogy. He uses many... and to sum it up, I learned more about my purpose in life from this book than I had from reading A Pupose Driven Life by Rick Warren, another reference in the

book.

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