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WITHOUT HELMETS OR SHOULDER PADS

THE AMERICAN WAY OF DEATH IN FOOTBALL CONDITIONING

Irvin Muchnick

By now, football’s concussion crisis is well known: every year brings headlines of our Hall of Fame heroes behaving erratically and dying young. But did you know that several kid players across the continent drop dead every year before a single ball is snapped — just from extreme conditioning drills directed by all-powerful coaches? *Without Helmets or Shoulder Pads* takes the conversation about football and public health to a new level with investigations of the sport’s underreported worst tragedies and their cover-ups, at major universities, obscure junior colleges, and high schools. These add up to a kind of quiet pandemic — a socially induced one enabled by our thirst for spectacle and by a skewed vision of masculinity.

Here are the shocking stories of young men who get struck down by exertional heatstroke and other causes sometimes not even acknowledged (such as the sickle cell trait syndrome that afflicts many African Americans). When the worst happens, the football world simply buries the evidence, pays off victims’ families, and moves on.

No matter how much we enjoy America’s most popular sport at elite levels, this book makes the case that it belongs out of our public schools and off our public fields.

Irvin Muchnick “produces magnificent investigative journalism,” wrote the late dean of sportswriters, Frank Deford. Muchnick’s writings have inspired congressional investigations of deaths in the pro wrestling industry and government investigations — in the U.S., Ireland, Brazil, and Venezuela — of sexual abuse by youth swimming coaches. He lives in Berkeley, California.



KEY SALES NOTES

- **ACCOMPLISHED AUTHOR:** Irvin Muchnick is the author of three books and has written for major publications such as *Sports Illustrated*, *People*, the *Washington Monthly*, and the Sunday magazines of the *New York Times*, and the *Los Angeles Times*.
- **DISTINGUISHED MEDIA PERSONALITY:** Muchnick has appeared on media forums as diverse as National Public Radio’s *Fresh Air* with Terry Gross and the former Fox News program *The O’Reilly Factor*. Frank Deford, the late sportswriter, author, and public radio commentator, said, “Irv Muchnick produces magnificent investigative journalism . . . He writes with passion and savage humor.”
- **A HIGHLY UNDERREPORTED ASPECT OF FOOTBALL:** Very often the deaths of young footballers are attributed to asthma, heatstroke, genetic heart disease, and sometimes blamed on exertional collapse associated with sickle cell trait, however what they fail to highlight is that these deaths are a side-effect of the game itself. This book will help educate readers on making well-informed choices about contact sports.
- **INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM AT ITS FINEST:** Muchnick lends his sports writing expertise to exposing some of the cover-ups of the death of young footballers by popular institutions.
- **IN THE NEWS:** 2022 alone saw the deaths of about 10 young NFL players, as documented by *USA Magazine* and CNN, among other major news outlets.