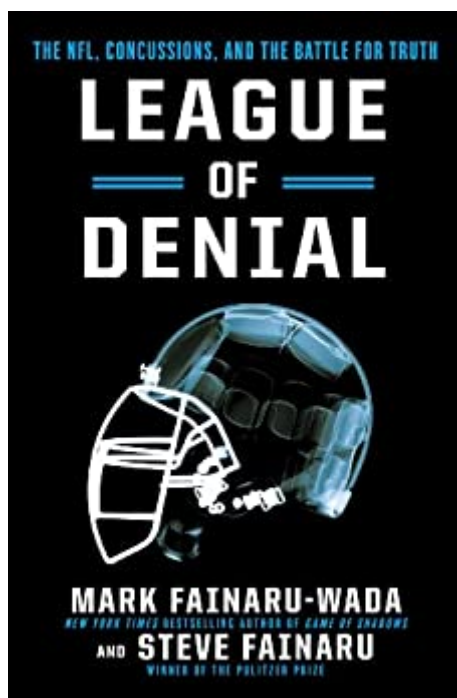


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League Of Denial: The NFL, Concussions, And The Battle For Truth



Synopsis

“PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL PLAYERS DO NOT SUSTAIN FREQUENT REPETITIVE BLOWS TO THE BRAIN ON A REGULAR BASIS.” So concluded the National Football League in a December 2005 scientific paper on concussions in America’s most popular sport. That judgment, implausible even to a casual fan, also contradicted the opinion of a growing cadre of neuroscientists who worked in vain to convince the NFL that it was facing a deadly new scourge: A chronic brain disease that was driving an alarming number of players -- including some of the all-time greats -- to madness. *League of Denial* reveals how the NFL, over a period of nearly two decades, sought to cover up and deny mounting evidence of the connection between football and brain damage. Comprehensively, and for the first time, award-winning ESPN investigative reporters Mark Fainaru-Wada and Steve Fainaru tell the story of a public health crisis that emerged from the playing fields of our 21st century pastime. Everyone knew that football is violent and dangerous. But what the players who built the NFL into a \$10 billion industry didn’t know -- and what the league sought to shield from them -- is that no amount of padding could protect the human brain from the force generated by modern football; that the very essence of the game could be exposing these players to brain damage. In a fast-paced narrative that moves between the NFL trenches, America’s research labs and the boardrooms where the NFL went to war against science, *League of Denial* examines how the league used its power and resources to attack independent scientists and elevate its own flawed research -- a campaign with echoes of Big Tobacco’s fight to deny the connection between smoking and lung cancer. It chronicles the tragic fates of players like Hall of Fame Pittsburgh Steelers center Mike Webster, who was so disturbed at the time of his death he fantasized about shooting NFL executives; and former Chargers great Junior Seau, whose diseased brain became the target of an unseemly scientific battle between researchers and the NFL. Based on exclusive interviews, previously undisclosed documents and private emails, this is the story of what the NFL knew and when it knew it -- questions at the heart of crisis that threatens football, from the highest levels all the way down to Pop Warner.

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Customer Reviews

I write this review as the first wife of a former professional football player (quarterback). While reading League of Denial, I have cried over the stories from the players and their wives. I lived that life. My husband played serious football through high school, university, and professional ball through the 70's. As far as I know, he had at least 11 concussions during his football career. Some of those concussions put him in the hospital. Then the next day, he was back on the football field. While sitting in the stands with the other football wives I often heard the fans yelling, "Kill the quarterback". A difficult thing to listen to. My former husband has always had sever headaches. Those headaches often caused him to be an absent father to our three sons. To see your husband go from a peaceful loving man to one who at times was controlling, angry, and abusive, was no less than shattering and very confusing. His unpredictable behavior often scared me. League of Denial has helped me realize that my husband's behavior was not always his fault. Now, I understand his odd behavior and it makes sense to me. And, it makes me very sad. How sad that neither one of us knew at that time what was happening to his brain. Football does not only affect the players but it also affects the families who are involved in this game. The denial of the danger of football, by the NFL, is understandable from a monetary perspective. However, it is not an excuse. I dearly hope that the Canadian Football League players take care of themselves. By doing so, they are also taking care of their wives and children. I also dearly hope that the fans will listen to themselves when they yell in dissatisfaction at the players. The fans have no idea how hard the players are working. This is their life and ultimately sometimes their death.

Reading a book featuring the stars of professional football, and the coterie surrounding them is always enjoyable. One feels closer to the action which is so much part of our daily lives. But this book is disturbing at many levels. First, as the story of the destructive nature of football related concussions is investigated and revealed, the story unfolds like a police procedural. What will be uncovered next? The authors keep you engaged and turning pages. But then, the story stops abruptly. It is not over. It is like those Dick Wolfe "Law and Order" episodes that end with "To be continued." Only we will not have the pleasure of a conclusion next week. There is no trial that has meaning. No affirming Law and Order. Then, there is the dark side of sports medicine to disillusion us. In fact it is the dark side of medical research as well. The authors do not pass final judgments, but it is clear that the allure of sports celebrity and money have an easy job in distorting the medicine and research practiced by many of the team physicians and the researchers behind them. Many of these people see and believe what profits them (or fans their vanity). The editors of the Journal, Neurosurgery, print unscientific peer-reviewed papers over the objection of the peer reviewers because it greatly increases the circulation to talk about professional athletes, and it assures the major editor of access to the sidelines at Giants games. These articles are then cited liberally as justification for what one Judge eventually calls it: fraud. Equally disturbing - and here I criticize the authors - is the central idea of the expose that the "NFL" has been doing terrible things to its major assets - the players. No, it was not the faceless "NFL", it was individuals making decision and taking actions. One of the most disturbing aspects of the story is that there is almost no personal responsibility and no one is held to account. The "NFL" pays up once in a while, but its officers have their plush offices, they have their celebrity, they have their large retirement plans and seats at the Super Bowl. None of the physicians really seems to suffer any loss or shame, except for the one person who started it all and kept true to his science. He is relegated to the sidelines, criticized by all who are pushing to score fame and fortune from the issue of concussions. This is not the authors fault. They give us plenty of opportunity to see this happen. They are not responsible for this cultural phenomenon. Consider how many individuals were held to account at Goldman, Sachs and the other Wall Street Firms. No, the money the firms had to pay came from all shareholders, not the managers who made the decisions and took the fraudulent actions. In many ways this is a book about a bigger subject than football. The public needs to see how it is complicit in rewarding poor science, applauding dangerous behavior, and accepting, if not encouraging, corporate America, be it the NFL and its irresponsible spinmeisters, or tobacco, or polluters, etc.. I encourage readers to keep this in mind as they read about the ives of some of our times' athletic

heroes.

I don't care for football, but I do care for fair play. I was not surprised to see how Big Football didn't play fair on the topic of CTE nor that its commitment to the financial bottom line ranks above its compassion for its players. This book got my interest right off the bat and kept it to the end. The well crafted writing and structure along with the factual presentation kept me reading, even through more detailed science than I wanted to process at the moment. I learned quite a lot and was delighted to see the detailed footnotes, even though I admit that I skimmed over portions that I didn't really want to try to understand at the level that the authors were able to and needed to present. Impressive and worth reading.

Despite the media's coverage of the regrettable behavior of the NFL toward the concussion crisis, my eyes were "wide shut" to the extent of the League's behavior, its abominable resistance to the truth, its lack of compassion in the face of the facts, its commitment only to profit, its casting a blind eye to the plight of the very men on the backs of whom it rose to such prominence and economic success. Yes, I understand that football is a violent sport, more so every year as the players become bigger and faster, and the collisions more destructive to the human body; for that very reason the League should be more responsive to the real truth, not its own manufactured truth. The League's profit, the team's profits, are so unbelievably huge; there is so much money available for doing good in that organization. Why the selfishness, why the persistent greed? It must adjust the rules of the game to accommodate the new reality, and it must use its vast resources to help the victims of the game, players who are rightly termed modern day gladiators. I used to enjoy watching football, and to an extent I still do. But now, thanks to the "League of Denial," I watch with eyes wide open...

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