



Lost in the Lights: Sports, Dreams, and Life

Paul Hemphill

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A veteran journalist's collection of sportswriting on the blue-collar South.

Sport mirrors life. Or, in Paul Hemphill's opinion, "Sport is life." The 15 pieces in this compelling collection are arranged along the timeline for an aspiring athlete's dream: "The Dawning," with stories about boys hoping and trying to become men, "The Striving," about athletes at work, defining themselves through their play, and "The Gloaming," about the twilight time when athletes contend with broken dreams and fading powers. Through all the pieces, Hemphill exhibits his passion for the sports he covers and a keen eye for the dramas, details, and hopes that fire the lives of athletes, allowing them to become prototypes of all human existence.

Most of the stories have been previously published in such national magazines as *Sports Illustrated, True, Life, Today's Health*, and *Sport*. In "White Bread and Baseball," the author chronicles his own boyhood infatuation with the minor-league Birmingham Barons, while in "Yesterday's Hero" he details the sad end of a former All-American football player named Bob Suffridge, a portrait of a lion in winter. "It's a Mad, Mad, Mad Whirl" covers nights on the road with the roller derby, and "Saturday Night at Dixie Speedway" captures all the raucous glory of a stock-car dirt track under the hot lights. "Big Night, Big City" tells of an anxious, small-town high school basketball team facing their crucial chance for glory at a state tournament in Atlanta, and the classic "Mister Cobb" details a personal lesson on sliding the young author received from "the greatest player in the history of baseball."

These stories are often bittersweet, emotional, and mythic: little dramas bearing impact and psychological "size." Some of them are distinctively "Dixie," but they ultimately transcend time and place. Frye Gaillard, author of *Kyle at 200 MPH: A Sizzling Season in the Petty-NASCAR Dynasty*, writes, "For more than 30 years, Paul Hemphill has been one of the finest writers in the South, and I think he proves it again in this collection. He exudes a natural feel for the players and the game, drawing out the real-life themes of struggle and desire, occasional triumph, and the omnipresent possibilities of heartache and failure."



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