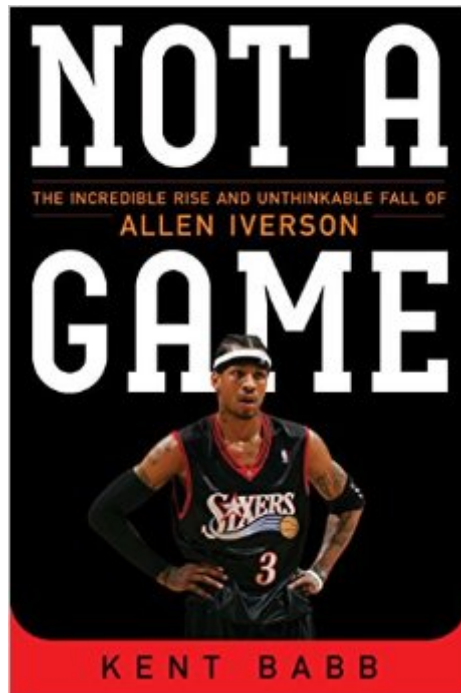


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Not A Game: The Incredible Rise And Unthinkable Fall Of Allen Iverson



Synopsis

Former NBA superstar Allen Iverson was once one of America's most famous athletes: a trendsetter who transcended race, celebrity, and pop culture, and emerged from a troubled past to become one of the most successful and highly compensated athletes in the world. Now, his life and career comes vividly to light in this hard-hitting biography that examines what drove his successes and failures. Through extensive research and interviews with those closest to Iverson, acclaimed Washington Post sportswriter Kent Babb gets behind the familiar, sanitized, and heroic version of Iverson—the hard-charging, hard-partying athlete who played every game as if it were his last. Babb brings to life a private, loyal, and often generous Allen Iverson who rarely made the headlines, revealing the back story behind some of Iverson's most memorable moments, such as his infamous "Practice" rant, delving even deeper to discover where Iverson's demons lurked. He drank too much, stayed out too late, spent more money than most people could spend in a dozen lifetimes—blowing more than \$150 million of his NBA earnings alone. His then wife Tawanna, seen often as the mild-mannered woman who tamed the bad boy, tried to keep her husband and family on the rails. But she was no match, as so many others learned on basketball courts, for the force of nature that Iverson was—jealousy, meanness, and a restlessness eventually wearing down even his biggest fan, teammate, and, eventually, his most formidable opponent. Over time, Iverson himself had come to believe his own hype: that he lived in a world where celebrity is eternal and riches are everlasting. He was about that life even when he was no longer the fastest man on the court, as endorsement deals and long-term contracts became a thing of the past. Some in his inner circle saw the writing on the wall and encouraged Iverson to embrace life beyond basketball. But instead, he remained in denial. *Not a Game* is an impeccably researched, sometimes uncomfortable look at the factors that led to the rise and fall of a basketball superstar. In doing so, it illuminates the dark side of our modern day, multi-billion dollar sports and entertainment culture in which talented players are disposable and all too often success and tragedy wear the same number.

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Customer Reviews

When this book came out in early June, it received lots of press in the Philadelphia media for the chapter discussing Allen Iverson's famous practice rant. In a larger sense, though, Kent Babb's searing biography of Iverson paints an ugly picture of the player as a mean drunk with a severe alcohol problem. Iverson burned through \$150 million in his career and still drinks Coronas to excess nearly every day of his life at T.G.I. Fridays and P.F. Changs because that is "exotic" beer to him. The book felt like a combination of Mickey Mantle meets Mike Tyson. Like Mantle, Iverson was a Hall of Fame player in his sport, yet he remains an undependable alcoholic whose greatness could have been even more amazing. Like Tyson, Iverson burned through a staggering amount of wealth while being bled dry by moochers and hangers on. The book does include somewhat shocking stories of a destitute Iverson calling up ex teammates and asking to borrow money by 2011 and violent fights with his wife, Tawanna, that included chasing her around Philadelphia with a gun and vowing to either "...die or I'm going to jail. And I guarantee you I'm not going to die." But it is the "We talkin' 'bout practice" rant that is seemingly the most fascinating part of the book. I am a huge fan of playing low-level poker, and Atlantic City was where I first heard that the genesis for the practice rant was that Iverson was an alcoholic who would keep vampire hours and frequently drink to excess in A.C. until 8-9 a.m., then be unable to make practice a few hours later. The Babb book confirms that Iverson was drunk during the rant. It blows my mind that a guy could miss 70 practices in one year.

Besides the pre and post-game interviews; the magazine covers and sneaker endorsements; the debates that consumed gym periods and barbershop visits; besides playing Live--when it was good--and 2K into the twilight hours of the night, it never occurred to me that the players I watched--crossing over, stepping back, pulling up and taking off--were actually people. This may strike some of you as absurd: "Well of course they're people, they don't just play basketball all day." While this is undoubtedly true--that athletes are undoubtedly human--what's also true is that we

seldom reckon with the humanity of athletes until they lose. By lose, I don't mean the sacrifices these players make and the inevitable loss that goes with it; I mean the collateral damage we feel when we can no longer use them for our own ends. It isn't until their ratings in 2K drop, or they're battling injury after injury, or their bank accounts are depleted, or they're falling deeper and deeper into the abyss of the depth chart, or found unconscious on the floor of a Nevada brothel that we realize that these players have interior lives that continue long after the last buzzer. Kent Babb's *Not a Game* is a critical investigation into the other 22 hours of a life more complex than cornrows, crossovers and diatribes about practice. "In the late 90s, America was undergoing an interesting cultural shift. It's heroes were no longer who wore ties and obeyed the rules." With so many questions about how rebellion would look and live in this generation, Allen Iverson provided himself as the "Answer," refusing to back down from any defender, double-team or NBA legend.

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