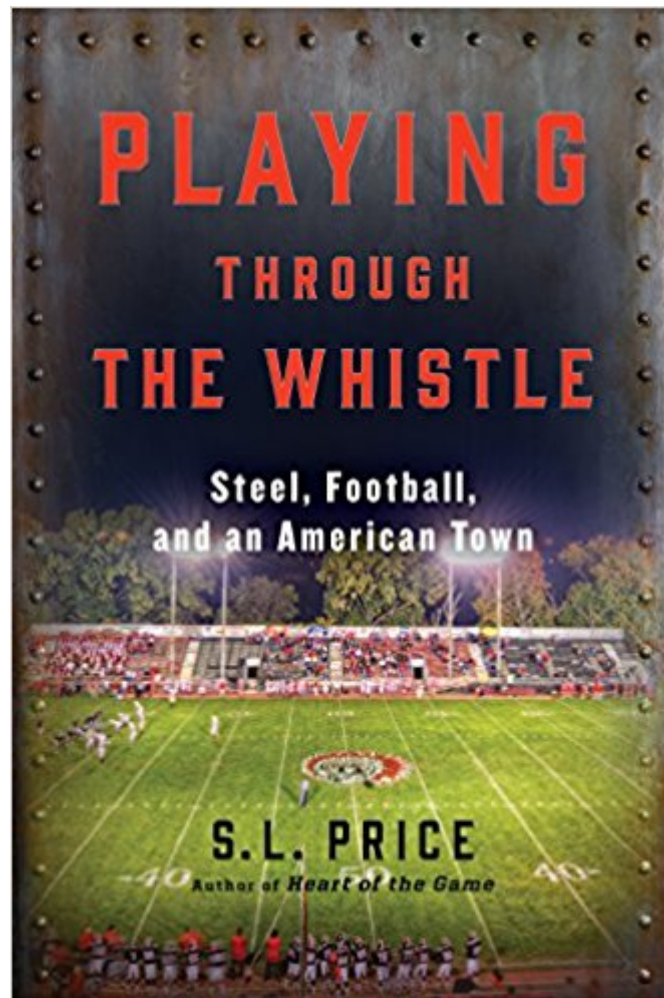




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Playing Through The Whistle: Steel, Football, And An American Town



Synopsis

In the early twentieth century, down the Ohio River from Pittsburgh, the Jones & Laughlin Steel Company built one of the largest mills in the world and a town to go with it. Aliquippa was a beacon and a melting pot, pulling in thousands of families from Europe and the Jim Crow south. The J&L mill, though dirty and dangerous, offered a chance at a better life. It produced the steel that built American cities and won World War II and even became something of a workers' paradise. But then, in the 1980s, the steel industry cratered. The mill closed. Crime rose and crack hit big. But another industry grew in Aliquippa. The town didn't just make steel; it made elite football players, from Mike Ditka to Ty Law to Darrelle Revis. Pro football was born in Western Pennsylvania, and few places churned out talent like Aliquippa. Despite its troubles, maybe even because of them, Aliquippa became legendary for producing football greatness. A masterpiece of narrative journalism, *Playing Through the Whistle* tells the remarkable story of Aliquippa and through it, the larger history of American industry, sports, and life. Like football, it will make you marvel, wince, cry, and cheer.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Praise for *Playing Through the Whistle*: Finalist for the 2017 PEN/ESPN Award for Literary Sports Writing Named a Best Book of 2016 by the Boston Globe, Kirkus Reviews, and Buffalo News (Best Sports Books) An No. 1 Bestseller (Football) An Best Book of the Month (History and Nonfiction) "Evocative and enterprising . . . [Playing Through the Whistle] is a big book . . . capturing major cultural shifts (and tensions) in a regional microcosm." —Wall Street Journal

“People who see sports as an escape from the real world might be surprised at just how often the two overlap. The American experience constantly darts into the western Pennsylvania town of Aliquippa in S.L. Price’s *Playing Through the Whistle* . . . Price unfurls social history in tandem with the successes and failures of the Aliquippa High Quips . . . If baseball is the national pastime, perhaps football is the national reality.”

New York Times Book Review “[A] masterwork . . . Engrossing, and heartbreaking.”

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette “Price has created not only a thorough history of high school football in Aliquippa but also a meticulous chronicle of the labor movement and the rise and fall of industrial America . . . Price gives Aliquippa a chance to tell its own story in these pages. And an important story it is.”

Pittsburgh Magazine “A great new book . . . Like the best sports books, *Playing Through the Whistle* is more than sports. It’s about history, it’s about geography, and most of all it’s about a place where the American Dream checked out a long time ago, and the only thing left behind is the echo of yesterday’s cheers. A book that should be read by anyone trying to understand what is happening in today’s America.”

Providence Journal “I’m impressed with the book and its wide-ranging look from the eyes of an out-of-towner . . . I commend Price for his in-depth look into the history of the town and a special look at the sports side of it.”

Beaver County Times “S.L. Price paints a beautiful, painful portrait of Aliquippa and its football program in *Playing Through the Whistle* . . . Price’s book is a tale that can swing from triumph to heartbreak in almost the blink of an eye.”

Pittsburgh City Paper “S.L. Price chronicles a richly detailed history of Aliquippa football . . . An unvarnished decade-by-decade look at the town, the team and the synergy between them . . . A fitting memorial to a remarkable story of urban struggle and athletic prowess.”

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette “Probably my favorite sports book of the year, even though sports are only part of the story.”

Buffalo News (Best Sports Books for 2016) “For NFL fans, Aliquippa, Pa., is known as a town that produced more than its share of football greatness. In an attempt to get at why, this book delves into the history of football, the state and draws a larger picture about American history. A great read.”

Toronto Star “*Playing Through the Whistle* . . . looks at the struggling steel town of Aliquippa, Pa., through the prism of its high school football team. The author understands the Rust Belt particulars of the region better than most political professionals.”

Wall Street Journal (What to Give: Sports Books) “[An] excellent book . . . Price captures the glory days when Aliquippa produced not only steel, but also prominent Americans, ranging from Mike Ditka to Henry

Mancini. *National Book Review* "S. L. Price . . . digs deep to report on Aliquippa's intertwined history of steel and football . . . Playing Through the Whistle is a history of a town but it's more than that . . . Price . . . writes perceptively about racial tensions, crack cocaine and the violence that has scarred Aliquippa . . . Honest, nuanced reporting." *News & Observer* "Price thoroughly explores the football saga . . . but this is no mere sports story . . . An artful mix of history, economics, sociology, and athletics . . . Price's especially touching engravings of the promise squandered, those chewed up and spit out by Aliquippa's tough environment, contrast powerfully with the tales of football triumph . . . Price's football story is really that of America's Rust Belt in poignant miniature." *Kirkus Reviews* (starred review) "[An] exhaustive history . . . A more thorough account of any high school athletic program in the country would be tough to find." *Publishers Weekly* "Price, a *Sports Illustrated* senior writer, tells the town's story all very well . . . There are . . . revealing anecdotes about individual players and the coaches . . . Good stuff for Friday Night Lights devotees." *Booklist* "Playing Through the Whistle is . . . rich history . . . In creative nonfiction journalistic style like that of Pete Hamill or Gay Talese . . . Price dramatically chronicles [Aliquippa's] rise and fall . . . Playing Through the Whistle is an omnibus modern history of the United States as played out in the football ethos of small town Aliquippa, Pa." *Shelf Awareness* "Year after year, some of the best books about the human condition come from sportswriters, and S.L. Price has added another illuminating work to that list. Playing Through the Whistle is about football in the legendary western Pennsylvania steel town of Aliquippa, but so much more. It is an evocative, wistful journey through decades of American struggle and achievement and loss." *David Maraniss*, author of *When Pride Still Mattered: A Life of Vince Lombardi* and *Once in a Great City: A Detroit Story* "Applause to S.L. Price for the mind-blowing research and gorgeous storytelling. Playing Through the Whistle is a sprawling display of Price's signature prose: sharp, vivid, and particular. You feel the heat of the blast furnace, the turf of the Friday night gridiron. With football as his lens, Price transports you to the glory days of an iconic American steel town, and envelops you in the saga of its ultimate demise." *Jeanne Marie Laskas*, *New York Times* best-selling author of *Concussion* "S.L. Price's Playing Through the Whistle is a big book on a tough town. It reminded me of *The Wire*, which is high praise." *Roy Blount Jr.*, author of *About Three Bricks Shy of a Load* and *Save Room for Pie* "S.L. Price is hands down the best writer about sports and the meaning of sports in America today, and this is his

most ambitious and finest work yet. *Playing Through the Whistle* is an exhaustively reported and expertly written narrative about the rise and fall of industrial America and football's central place in that story. Stefan Fatsis, author of *A Few Seconds of Panic* and *Word Freak* "Playing Through the Whistle is a gut-wrenching portrait of a high school football team that has to embody the American dream for one small town, in large part because everything else that was supposed to do it has fallen apart. I would say this is some of the best sports writing I read this year, except that it's some of the best writing I've read this year." David Epstein, author of *The Sports Gene* "Among Scott Price's many interesting and well-crafted sentences is this: 'Heavy industry and football share the same DNA. If so, the progeny of big steel is, in fact, high school football. Even as mill life disappears, football lives remain. With deeply nuanced reporting, and a style that's both big-hearted and unsentimental, *Playing Through the Whistle* isn't merely the history of an American town, but American history itself.'" Mark Kriegel, author of *Namath and Pistol*

S. L. Price, a senior writer at *Sports Illustrated* since 1994, is the author of three previous books: *Heart of the Game*; *Pitching Around Fidel*, which was a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize; and *Far Afield*, which *Esquire* named one of the top five reads of 2007. He lives in Washington, D.C., with his family.

This is not a book about football! Don't be disappointed! It is a touching story about a Pennsylvania Steel Mill Town. It describes what it was like in Aliquippa, who lived, breathed and died Friday Night Football. It was a way to get out of that town. So many famous people came from Aliquippa, it was a spot in time...like no other. This is a book about the history of America, the disintegration of America, the story of the Crips and the Bloods, and the breakdown of the American Family...no this is not a book about football, this is a Great story of America. Thanks to my husband for the recommendation, and thanks to his friend for giving it to him as a gift.

An amazing book, about class struggle and racism as much as it is about a dying steel town's football team. Well worth reading and thinking about in a world where the poor are becoming poorer, the rich richer, but through it all, the working people of Aliquippa, PA call their town home, a place to come to, to find open arms, to find comfort and acceptance despite your victories or losses, a place that has not lost its pride despite being victim to corporate greed.

Very good in depth look at a town, it's history and it's obsession with high school football. I live about 50 miles from Aliquippa so I'm familiar with the success they have had on the football field. The book really gives you the feel for the depression that the town is experiencing with the shutdown of the steel industry and everything that had provided work for the residents. It's more than a book about the stars that have made the town famous. The research must have been extensive and the quality of the story shows that. Worthwhile read for sports fans that want to go beyond the headlines to the more inside story.

A great look back at what a factory town used to be and what happens when that factory deserts them. Gives new meaning to why Pennsylvania football players are so tough. Makes you nostalgic for the old days of good paying steady jobs.

Having been born in Aliquippa, PA and living in Western PA until my early 20s, the book was very fascinating just because i knew just about every area the writer discussed. It was even more interesting to read about family members in the book. I had a grandfather nearly beaten to death in the 1930s due to Union Activities at J and L. I remember the smoke stacks pouring out sulfur smelling smoke, the blue flames at night from the oxygen plant. Aliquippa is merely a shell of what it was compared to living there in the late 60s early 70s. Its not even a safe place to walk the streets anymore.

This was a wonderful read that pulled together the history of a town and its people as seen through the lense of the rise and fall of the steel industry. Even if you're not familiar with the town of Aliquippa, or not a football fan, you'll see how the intersection of big industry and immigration resulted in a microcosm of all the good and bad of American society in one small town in western PA. I'll be interested in a relook 10 years from now to see if there is any successful turnaround in the works.

Having lived and worked in Aliquippa, I was totally absorbed in this well researched and unbiased literary masterpiece. Anyone who wants to understand the geopolitical and social realities of the demise of the industrial revolution, and its effects on this once vibrant and still proud community, will be deeply enlightened by reading this book.

Excellent book and so well-written! If you want to read more from this author, pick up Sports Illustrated on the newsstands, or subscribe to it, which I have been doing for over 40 years. Top-notch!

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