

Walker, J. Samuel. *ACC Basketball: The Story of the Rivalries, Traditions, and Scandals of the First Two Decades of the Atlantic Coast Conference*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press. 2011.

ACC Basketball by Samuel Walker explores the creation of the ACC Conference. More specifically on the basketball rivalry between schools the conference is known for. The core arguments of this book focus on the tensions between academics and athletics and the larger sociological and cultural implications at play. The book provides a look into the past of ACC college basketball to give readers an understanding of the depth and history of the rivalries in the conference. The original members of the ACC were Wake Forest, Duke, UNC, NC State, Virginia, South Carolina, Clemson, and Maryland. Walker makes sure that each gets a section of the book dedicated to each of their respective coaches, players, important games for the schools, recruitment, and interaction with the schools administrators.

This book covers a wide range of topics, with each different chapter having a separate focus. The focus may be on a specific coach or team, or broader topics; for example integration of basketball in the ACC. Walker doesn't use an exact chronological order, jumping around in time periods depending on the school he is referring to. This works however, as Walker jumps around in time, he doesn't jump around with the overarching theme of the chapter. The chapters are incredibly detail heavy, and it is easy to get bogged down in the first few chapters with how much information is given to you. There were times where it was difficult to follow names of coaches, players, and administrators all at once. I caught myself having to go back through these first few chapters more than once. While this book is obviously written in the "sports nerd" fashion, Walker does make connections to the broader implications of the time. The rise of television, the growing civil rights movement, and the making of the modern South play out on the basketball court as well. Using the incredible detail as I described, Walker gives examples of the issues of integration down to exact games with unruly fans, issues that black players faced traveling to games, and the issue of integrating the schools within the ACC themselves. With the rise of media as well, we see Walker describe the fanbase shifting from purely in-person to many fans watching at home.

Walker also emphasizes the importance of ACC basketball growing the reputation of the member schools themselves. The South was not known for its great academic universities at the time. The spectacle of basketball that these universities had on them, either willingly or unwillingly by administrators of the school, brought a spotlight to the academics as well. Walker mentions this in nearly every chapter. This drives the point home on one of Walker's main points in this book. The struggle between collegiate sports coaches and fans to put pressure on schools to improve athletics, and university administrators, professors, and intellectuals tugging the opposite direction to keep universities upholding academic excellence. Gordon Gray, Chancellor of UNC, once said in 1954 that "Intercollegiate athletics is the biggest problem I have." from

Chapters 5 “The Big Four”, through to the final chapter “The 800 Rule and the Departure of South Carolina.” The 800 Rule, which stipulated that you had to score at least an 800 on the SAT to participate in ACC athletics, was discussed throughout these later chapters. The 800 Rule was a perfect example that Walker utilized to showcase the tug-of-war over athletics and academic pressures from the ACC itself and its member universities.

Coming away from this book, my largest criticism is the prior knowledge needed to understand this book. If you were not at least slightly familiar with names, universities, and coaches prior to reading this, you would come away scratching your head. I can appreciate the intricate details of specific games, and the writing in a “sports nerd” fashion, but I came away wondering if it was the best way to approach this. There was a large amount of information you had to remember, packed into only 9 chapters. I also was wondering, what about women's sports? I realize at the time that many conferences did not have women’s teams, but from doing a quick search on the internet it seemed that in the late 60’s and 70’s teams women's teams were starting to form in the ACC, and I do not recall a mention of this in the book.

Walker's “*ACC Basketball*” is an intricate overview of the creation of the ACC, and the path it took to what it is today. Detail heavy, but also gives insight into the larger implications at play as well. A tug-of-war between academics and athletics is consistent throughout, as well as the idea of the modern South trying to form a new reputation in the nation sphere. Through sports, Walker details the games in great detail, and created a great book in “*ACC Basketball.*”

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