

## Review

Reviewed Work(s): Walker, ACC Basketball: The Story of the Rivalries, Traditions, and Scandals of the First Two Decades of the Atlantic Coast Conference by J. Samuel Walker

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J. Samuel Walker, *ACC Basketball: The Story of the Rivalries, Traditions, and Scandals of the First Two Decades of the Atlantic Coast Conference* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

As the ACC continues to see continued success in NCAA Tournament play this season (23-24) it only makes sense to reflect on what caused The University of North Carolina and NC State to share a conference with Maryland and The University of Virginia. *ACC Basketball* by J. Samuel Walker explores the creation and controversy of the early era of the Atlantic Coast Conference, from its inception in 1953 to the University of South Carolina leaving in 1971. The book also covers the creation period of the ACC before the conference's inaugural season in 1953. This book offers an in-depth look into the politics and scandals that created and defined In his writing, Walker appeals to these more devoted fans of the sport by covering games and events in a way that strikes you as a game recap or post-game commentary by an announcer, making sure to keep the topic interesting yet focused on the bigger picture of the NCAA.

The ACC is known today as one of the major conferences in the country for all sports, earning the reputation of being a "power" conference. This reputation is upheld by its continued strength and success in basketball, but the early history of the conference is largely forgotten by the casual fan with the modern success it has had. The ACC started as a way to protect the interests of some Southern Conference members, but it evolved into a conference of its own.

The book features nine chapters. The first three focus on the creation and founders of the ACC, while the following six chapters are about how the ACC evolved from a conference into **the** conference for collegiate basketball in the United States. I found Chapter One "The Crisis in College Sports" and Chapter Two "The Founding of the ACC" to drag on for a little too long, and I believe that fans of the ACC who want to learn more about basketball in the conference can skip these two to go straight into the history of ACC Basketball specifically. I do recommend these chapters to general audiences who are more interested in the politics and themes of collegiate sports, as topics of what makes a "student-athlete" and gambling in sports are not only still very relevant in the present day but are also themes that echo across the book and the history of the ACC. I found Chapter Five "The Big Four" to be very enjoyable as it covers the main teams that are at the heart of *ACC Basketball*, The University of North Carolina, Duke, N.C. State, and Wake Forest all of which are part of the "Tobacco Road" rivalry in the state of North Carolina. The chapter excels at not only covering these teams but also how these teams impacted the history of basketball and the conference in general. Chapter 7 "The Integration of ACC Basketball" is also very powerful as it covers the struggle that African-American athletes faced not only in college but also going to college in the South where

there was rampant racism. Each university had its own struggles in fully integrating its basketball programs, and some have stories of players, specifically Billy Jones of Maryland, the first African-American to play ACC Basketball, and Charlie Scott of UNC who was the first athlete to receive a scholarship at the school for basketball. They were key in integrating basketball, but also a key piece in integrating a region that was almost as obsessed with basketball as they were prejudiced. The book does a fantastic job of covering these stories and does not hold back in its language and examples from that time period, offering an honest and in-depth look at a growing league that grew with and reflected its home region.

When I was reading this book, I could tell from the start that it was being written by a fan, who happens to also be a historian and a scholar. That is the biggest strength of the book, and what made me appreciate the writing and information that much more. As a sports fan reading a book I want to be able to get as much information as possible, and *ACC Basketball* archives that in a way that immerses you into the setting and takes you courtside to witness the creation of a powerhouse and cultural icon in the basketball world. For someone who is not fully familiar and lacks prior knowledge it may start out slow for them and come off as hard to read. I would highly recommend this book for any fan of basketball even if they are not fans of the ACC or old-school hoops. This book offers an in-depth dive into basketball history but also serves as a lens to look at modern basketball and the laws around it.