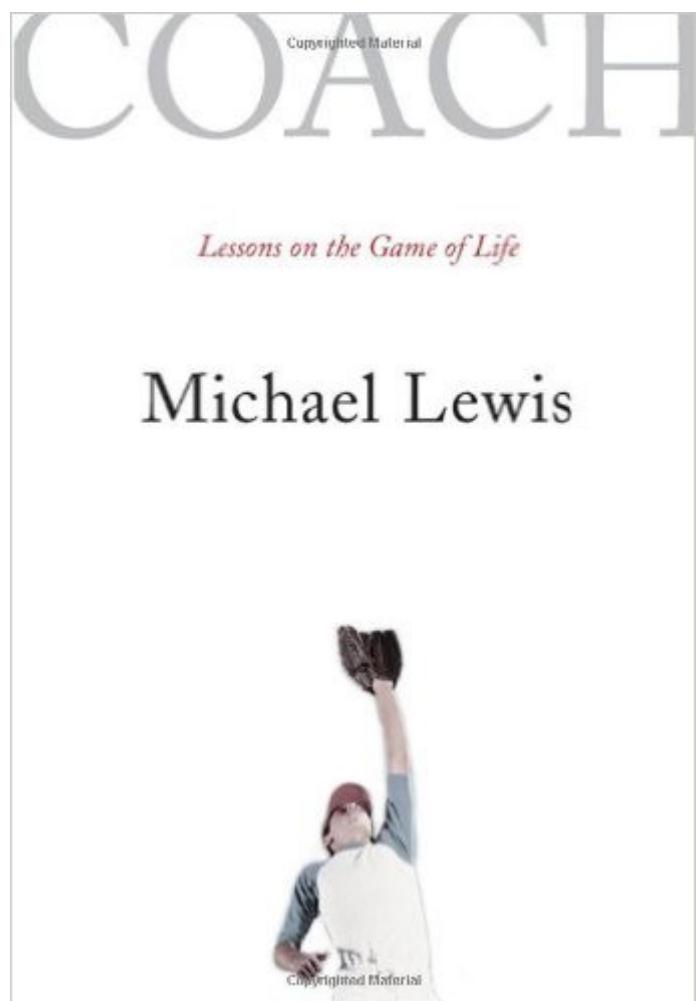


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Coach: Lessons On The Game Of Life



Synopsis

"[Lewis] has such a gift for storytelling."--New York Times There was a turning point in Michael Lewis's life, in a baseball game when he was fourteen years old. The irascible and often terrifying Coach Fitz put the ball in his hand with the game on the line and managed to convey such confident trust in Lewis's ability that the boy had no choice but to live up to it. "I didn't have words for it then, but I do now: I am about to show the world, and myself, what I can do." The coach's message was not simply about winning, but about self-respect, sacrifice, courage, and endurance. In some ways, and even now, thirty years later, Lewis still finds himself trying to measure up to what Coach Fitz expected of him.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Despite the fact that I am always fascinated by whatever Michael Lewis writes about, I had not planned to read Coach. In the bookstore, it looked like one of those "inspirational" books they stock at the checkout counter, next to the gift books about angels and cats. But then I heard an interview with Lewis on NPR radio. The book was originally a magazine article in the New York Times Magazine. He summarized the story in a few minutes. A coach he had at his prep school (I didn't even catch what sport Lewis was playing) had changed his life by treating him, in a critical moment in a must-win game, as if he was the clutch player Lewis and every other kid dreams of being. Lewis rose to the occasion and the confidence he gained from the experience radiated to his academic work and beyond. But now, twenty-some years later, the parents at the private school are pressuring the headmaster to oust the coach. They say his heavy-handed ways are hurting their

kids' self-esteem. Lewis ended his radio summary by revealing that publicity from the New York Times article had resulted in the coach keeping his job, although the school was now looking for a new headmaster. What a great story. It was short and had conflict as well as a satisfying ending. But then I read the book, which is simply the article, unchanged. In it, the coach has a temper that seems uncontrolled and frightening, even to the adult Lewis. Coach takes a second-place trophy his team won and smashes it on the locker room floor, indicating his disgust at not winning first. He refuses to drive home when the team has lost, obsessively walking miles through New Orleans at night (yikes) to punish himself for being a loser.

Lewis makes a remarkable statement: a person is not born with selfrespect, but earns it. A struggle to overcome fear and failure is necessary. There are those that try to instill these beliefs on children, even though the lesson is not appreciated immediately in their youth and the profoundly positive impact is not understood until later in life. This is what the book is about. Lewis' high school coach drives them hard. The kids don't understand why initially. Over time, they learn that through hard work they can achieve their goals--not just in athletics. Casual readers, based on earlier reviews, seem to think that the coach is obsessed with winning; they miss the point (just as Lewis did when he was in 7th grade). Lewis talks about a season when the team was 1-12: The coaches frustration is not with the win-loss record, but that they kids possess the drive to improve and compete. He is not preparing them to win baseball games, but obtain their goals for years to come in life. The book is a criticism of a growing opinion among parents that kids are born with respect, instead of needing to develop it. Achievement builds selfrespect, not conception. Parents should be exposing their children to fear and failure to allow them to overcome these obstacles instead of protecting them from it. The touching element is that a successful author living comfortably in the Bay area champions someone that people no longer believe in, because this person championed him when nobody, including Lewis, believed in himself. It is the ultimate strength of character that Lewis' coach successfully cultivated in Lewis and others. As a subscriber to the New York Times, I get the magazine. Unfortunately I did not see this article when it was published.

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