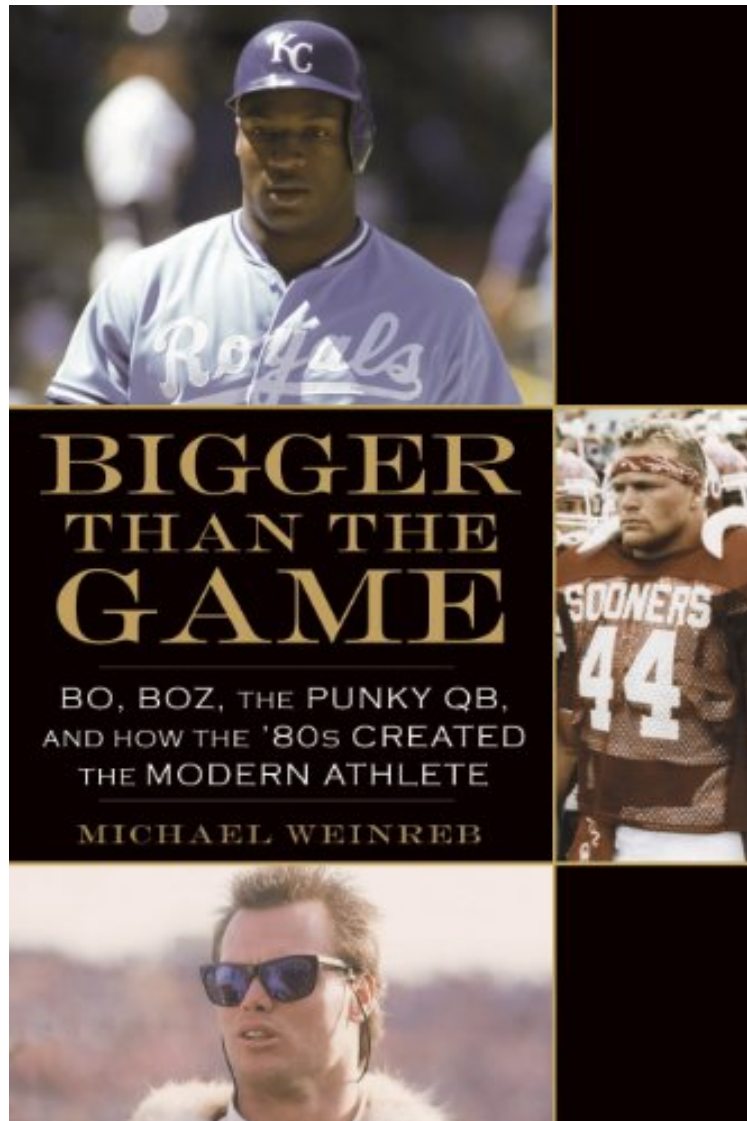


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Bigger Than the Game: Bo, Boz, the Punky QB, and How the '80s Created the Celebrity Athlete

Michael Weinreb

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Michael Weinreb : Bigger Than the Game: Bo, Boz, the Punky QB, and How the '80s Created the Celebrity Athlete before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Bigger Than the Game: Bo, Boz, the Punky QB, and How the '80s Created the Celebrity Athlete:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Bitter nostalgia for sports fans of a certain age, but will resonate with any era
By Nathan Webster
Just as the Yankees/Summer of Sam and Cowboys/Beleaguered Patriotism defined the

'70s, and OJ/Michael Jordan the '90s, author Michael Weinreb does a great job encapsulating all the names and faces from this vital decade in American sports culture, but really culture across the board. If you're a Boston sports fan of a certain age, the mid-'80s will be remembered with a bitter nostalgia, for the Patriots, Sox and especially Len Bias - whose death I heard about on the radio of all things, and had the same punched-in-the-gut-feeling I've felt for John Lennon, 9/11 and just a handful of other times. I'm not sure what a younger/older reader would think about this book, since they wouldn't have the same visceral attachment to the events of this narrative. But I have to think any sports fan will appreciate this in-depth look at the events that have shaped so much of today. A lot of these stories (the Bears, etc) don't really 'matter' that much, I guess, beyond how they created the monolith of sports. But the Len Bias story resonates as much today as 30 years ago - it really DID scare me straight. It's not that I was a drug user before Bias, but I would n-e-v-e-r touch drugs after that. But of course, I really believed cocaine killed him the first time he used it, and I used to rationalize that Bias "didn't deserve to be a Celtic." Never mind that there were no saints on that team. It was the '80s, after all. But most importantly, the catastrophic and failed "war on drugs" came out of an easy and scattershot political response. Both parties are to blame - and they used poor black kids to score points with their white suburban voters. Basically, they used flawed data and sketchy evidence to launch a misguided and poorly-planned war against a concept - "drugs" - instead of fighting the root effects of addiction. Without moralizing and melodrama, Weinreb reminds the reader how misguided this approach was. Mandatory minimum sentences for drugs that were greater than murders? Irrational. Brian Bozworth and of course Jim McMahon are flawed antiheroes of the era, who understood that media gave themselves the ability to blow themselves up more than ever before. Bo Jackson was the man who should have been the greatest. I'm glad that Michael Jordan (who really belonged to the '90s) is not dealt with that much here - yes, he belongs, but so much has been written about him that it's not necessary. As a sports fan of that time, I cared and felt it mattered. By 2014, I haven't watched a minute of the NFL this year, and don't miss it for a second. Sports began its climb to 2014's over-serious, too-expensive, un-fun bloated mess that it's become. I hate it, as much as I once loved it, and it all began in 1984 when Doug Flutie threw his Hail Mary that was replayed and replayed and replayed. Now, nothing is organic like that - it's all manipulated and packaged as a narrative, an approach that it could be argued began with the Bears of 1985. For a sports book to work (and one reason I'm not a fan of many of them) they can't rely on dated play-by-play, but have to connect sports to the larger culture. So Weinreb makes sure that all these 'characters' of the '80s fit into what we're living with today, even without writing about the present day at all. The comparison should be easily understood - don't think for a second that Tiger Woods didn't learn some lessons on how to market himself from Bo and the Boz. Great book, quick read, and the sometimes breezy and essayish tone makes it easy to read Weinreb's quite deep and complex analysis of how all this fit together. Five stars for epic history, maybe not - but certainly a five star sports-related book. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. One of my favorite sports books. By JB If you grew up in the mid-1980s this book is for you. I read the electronic version and just couldn't stop reading it - my phone, the iPad, etc. - it was like getting extra helpings of dessert. Weinreb's writing is at times brilliant and I couldn't help but be nostalgic for the '85 Bears, Nike's Bo Jackson "Bo Knows" campaign, and the college football rebel that was Brian Bosworth. But the best reporting came on the topic of Len Bias, his use of cocaine, and the role his death played in the "Just Say No" culture established in the Reagan era. Weinreb's access to Bias' mother leads to a halting passage that leaves the reader questioning the myths we have enjoyed as sports fans. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Essential, 100% Essential. By J. Hamlin Michael Weinreb has produced a brilliant read on a topic that binds all modern day sports fans. Tracing the origin of the modern day sporting superstar back to the mid eighties and the existence of 4 key athletes - Len Bias, Bo Jackson, Brian Bozworth Jim McMahon. You couldn't get 4 better stories and Weinreb researches them all and intertwines them with great skill (maybe a little too light on Boz - of who I to this day know the least about..) The drugs and especially Cocaine use was one of the key factors of 80's sports and is covered in detail - culminating in the death of Bias. The fact that the 4 biggest stars of the decade all had their careers cut short and ultimately didn't create the legacies they were expected too isn't really covered (guess we know this and it isn't the point) A classic. Couldn't put it down

A mesmerizing look at the year when American athletics went corporate, villains replaced heroes, and sports stars became superstars. Greed and excess defined the 1980s, and the sports world was no exception. Shifting from the love of the game to the love of money, athletes made the transition from representing honor and humility to becoming brash and branded. Capturing the stories of headliners who capitalized on this trend, *Bigger Than the Game* charts the rise (and sometimes spectacular fall) of four athletes over the span of one of the most dramatic eras in sports. Meticulously researched, with stirring, you-are-there reporting, *Bigger Than the Game* assembles a cast that includes Jim McMahon, who took the Chicago Bears to Super Bowl glory despite his penchant for partying and his aversion to following the game plan; Brian Bosworth, the university of Oklahoma linebacker who mugged for the cameras while calling the NCAA a communist organization; Bo Jackson, who pursued promising careers in both pro football and baseball; and Len Bias, poised to ensure the Boston Celtics' dominance but died of a cocaine overdose just one day after the draft. Also packed with portraits of folk heroes such as "Refrigerator" Perry and Michael Jordan, *Bigger Than the Game* offers a riveting ride for every sports fan.

From Publishers Weekly The mid-1980s introduced an unapologetic athlete archetype that captured headlines and airtime, taking advantage of a 24-hour news cycle and America's newfound appreciation of flashy, independent-minded heroes both real and fictional such as Ronald Reagan and Rocky Balboa. Weinreb expertly tracks this evolution via a quartet of athletes from that era: Chicago Bears headband-wearing, antiauthority quarterback Jim McMahon, who was more successful as a zeitgeist marketing tool than as a player; multi-sport star and Heisman Trophy winner Bo Jackson, who viewed his legendary athleticism as an investment; college basketball star Len Bias, whose fatal cocaine overdose hardened a sports-loving nation and led to its misguided obsession over illegal drugs; and flamboyant college football star Brian "The Boz" Bosworth, whose quest for publicity led him to the University of Oklahoma, where he consciously constructed an outrageous persona. In this lively and smart blend of essay and reporting, Weinreb (*Game of Kings*) details with conviction how seismic shifts in society and pop culture--soon-to-be behemoths Nike and ESPN were just hitting their strides--forever changed the conditions for attaining fame in sports, paving the way for the media-savvy athletes we know and (sometimes) love today. Copyright copy; Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From Booklist If the amalgam of athlete/pop icon was not created in the 1980s (Babe Ruth, anyone?), that era did produce a unique version juiced up by TV exposure and big money, with rebellion and drugs thrown in; traits all still found on pro rosters. Sportswriter Weinreb profiles four of the signature athletes of the day; former Bears quarterback Jim McMahon, University of Oklahoma standout linebacker Brian "The Boz" Bosworth, pro running back and All Star outfielder Bo Jackson, and Celtics first-round pick Len Bias, who died from a cocaine overdose the day after the draft. If they were their own men, they were also products of their times, and Weinreb does a fine job showing the symbiotic relationship between those athletes and the unfettered capitalism encouraged during the Reagan years. --Alan Moores "Weinreb is to be applauded for recognizing in the landscape of the '80s - whether he's talking about sports, politics, or ESPN - 'a full-on embrace of American excess at its most excessive.'" -"Boston Globe" "There was a time when sports were mostly legend; today, they're mostly marketing opportunities. Michael Weinreb has figured out when that evolution happened and how that transformation worked. Deeply researched and kinetically narrative, "Bigger than the Game" is technically about the year 1986, but it's actually about the jarring recognition of a new reality we can't escape." -Chuck Klosterman