



The Real All Americans: The Team That Changed a Game, a People, a Nation

Sally Jenkins

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Sally Jenkins, bestselling co-author of *It's Not About the Bike*, revives a forgotten piece of history in *The Real All Americans*. In doing so, she has crafted a truly inspirational story about a Native American football team that is as much about football as Lance Armstrong's book was about a bike.

If you'd guess that Yale or Harvard ruled the college gridiron in 1911 and 1912, you'd be wrong. The most popular team belonged to an institution called the Carlisle Indian Industrial School. Its story begins with Lt. Col. Richard Henry Pratt, a fierce abolitionist who believed that Native Americans deserved a place in American society. In 1879, Pratt made a treacherous journey to the Dakota Territory to recruit Carlisle's first students.

Years later, three students approached Pratt with the notion of forming a football team. Pratt liked the idea, and in less than twenty years the Carlisle football team was defeating their Ivy League opponents and in the process changing the way the game was played.

Sally Jenkins gives this story of unlikely champions a breathtaking immediacy. We see the legendary Jim Thorpe kicking a winning field goal, watch an injured Dwight D. Eisenhower limping off the field, and follow the glorious rise of Coach Glenn "Pop" Warner as well as his unexpected fall from grace.

The Real All Americans is about the end of a culture and the birth of a game that has thrilled Americans for generations. It is an inspiring reminder of the extraordinary things that can be achieved when we set aside our differences and embrace a common purpose.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

The Real All Americans: The Team That Changed a Game, a People, a Nation Details

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From Reader Review The Real All Americans: The Team That Changed a Game, a People, a Nation for online ebook

Loren Shultz says

Great story of one aspect of the genocide perpetrated on Native Americans, as seen through the filter of the Carlisle school and its football team.

M. Crabtree says

This book was fascinating in both the American history and football and sports history it revealed. I would highly recommend it, although some of it is challenging to get through simply because a lot of the Native American history is tragically unfair. However, this book was thoroughly researched and written in an engaging way so that you feel educated on both sports history and American history. I highly recommend this book to lovers of nonfiction and sports writing.

Cindy says

The history of Carlisle School, an Indian boarding school in the Carlisle, Pennsylvania from 1879 through 1918. Young Native Americans were recruited from reservations to be educated in the white mans' language and skills.

They had an early top rated football team! Jim Thorpe, possibly the greatest athlete ever, attended there. He played football against Ike (President Dwight D. Eisenhower) when Carlisle played Army.

A good history that will tear at your heart, and have you clapping for the natural abilities and intelligence of the students.

All of the school property, known as the Carlisle Barracks, is now a part of the U.S. Army War College. Don Andrews, a current neighbor, actually ran track at Carlisle.

Priscilla says

I did not know that much of the history of football is the history of Indian Boarding schools, specifically Carlisle in Pennsylvania, where Pop Warner coached and Jim Thorpe played. I did assume that it started out as a type of war game, and in fact, there were seasons in which players died, as many as twenty-one in one season. For the most part, it was just a slugfest, which had few rules and most players got injured. It isn't much better now, even with more rules and better equipment.

K says

Excellent book about a piece of American history that's basically unknown -- and the parts that are "known" are known incorrectly by most people. But the reader should be forewarned that this is more of a history book than it is a sports book. Though there's a great deal of coverage of the development of football in the late 19th century and early 20th, and some general review of the highlight plays of pivotal games in the early days of college football, much more of this book about the treatment of American Indians. Let's put it this way: this "football book" starts with a short anecdote about Carlisle v. Army in 1912, but then immediately steps back to 1866, when Indians had one of their greatest ambushes of U.S. soldiers, but that led to brutal reprisals that killed thousands.

It's a fascinating and infuriating story, as the white Americans killed or cheated Native Americans again and again and again. The Indians come across as eloquent, brave, arrogant and, eventually, resigned to their fate of being pushed around by a more numerous people.

But yet, a few brave American souls, such as Col. Richard Henry Pratt, tried to fight the tide of prejudice, but there were limits to what they could accomplish. Indians were seen as subhuman, and nobody had the time to think about them when America was all about expansion and getting your own stake on virgin farmland and grazing areas. Pratt is the real hero of the book, even though he's a flawed guy himself. A fearless kid who had to raise himself from about age 13, he was a Civil War hero, an Indian fighter in the most brutal conditions for 8 years, and then had the inspiration that instead of fighting and jailing and abusing Indians, they should be educated in the white man's ways. He pushed his plan by rehabilitating Indians jailed in Florida under his command -- Indians who were basically on death row -- and then leveraged that into use of a Revolutionary War barracks in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, which he turned into the first Indian school. Though that school made a lot of mistakes by our standards, such as the effort to totally erase the Indians' culture, it also gave kids a chance and set many of them on paths to successful lives in either the white world or back in Indian territory. These were kids who knew no English, who had never seen a train or a staircase, and he turned them into English speakers and writers, and marching band members and football players.

Oh, yeah, football. The 2nd half of the book is about how a superintendent at the school about a decade into its existence convinced Pratt that the boys should be allowed to field a team, since they were goofing around with football on their free time. Pratt, in typical style, told them if they were going to do it, they should shoot for beating the best teams in the U.S. -- Harvard, Yale, Princeton, etc. And within a couple of years they were competing fairly evenly with them and then beat those top teams in some of the most memorable games of the first couple decades of organized football.

This book tells it all. The violence of the game at the time. The racism of America, and the extra racism that came from the elites who played football and the Ivy League schools and their fans. The abuse they threw at Carlisle (as well as having squads of 30-40 players, while Carlisle had maybe 15) was astounding. But Carlisle persisted and gained respect from opponents, then the sports newspapers, then wider media and even from political leaders. An amazing story, with echoes that occur today when we see the sports field bring people together or bring racial issues to the forefront.

C Baker says

This is absolutely one of the best sports history books I've ever read. Sally Jenkins tells the full history of the

Carlisle Indian football team, truly an amazing part of football history.

The Carlisle Indian Industrial School was opened by Lt. Col. Richard Henry Pratt in 1879. Pratt had been the Superintendent of a prison for Indians incarcerated during the various outbreaks of violence on the plains where he taught Indians to read and write and believed they were every bit the equal of white men. When Pratt opened the school, some of the students were sons of the very same men imprisoned by the U.S. government under Pratt, and in fact some of the students were essentially hostages of the U.S. government. Pratt believed that through education, discipline, and adoption of white man's ways, that Indians could fully succeed in the growing American nation. While horribly paternalistic, it was enlightened for the times, as Pratt firmly believed Native Americans were every bit the equal of white men if given the chance to succeed.

Once the school opened some of the students became enamored of a new game evolving, American football, then dominated by the Ivy League schools, especially Yale and Harvard. Pratt agreed to put together a team called the Carlisle Indians, and eventually hired Glen "Pop" Warner to be its head coach. The school opened its inaugural football season in 1895, when they went 4-4 despite being robbed by the referees in some games. Given a very small recruiting pool and the violence of the game in that era, Pop Warner eventually made an undersized, and often undermanned team competitive with the likes of the dominant Yale, Harvard, and Army teams of the era.

The team soon had one of the most famous athletes in American history, Jim Thorpe. Jenkins does an excellent job of providing a mini-biography of Thorpe in this book and what he meant to the school. Thorpe was a somewhat eccentric, fun loving, even lazy character but his athletic prowess was amazing. Jenkins does an fantastic job of exploring Thorpe and the way Pop Warner got the best out of him, most of the time.

This book succeeds on many, many levels. First, it acts as a history of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School and the regime of Pratt. It fully places this amazing football team within the context of its times and what it meant for a team, all Native Americans, to be facing and competing equally with the scions of high society, and military teams, on the football field. She also puts the football team into the context and mission of the school itself, which was to instill education and discipline among its students, and how the team gave the school an additional reason to be proud. In fact, the team's successes, and even its character when being cheated against by referees, was proof of Pratt's philosophy and a showcasing of the proud, smart, solid character of its students.

Second, it acts as a biography, of sorts, of Glen "Pop" Warner and his unique coach-player relationship with the often recalcitrant Jim Thorpe. Warner was able to get the best out of Thorpe, and is the man who shepherded him to his gold medals in the Olympics. Further, Jenkins brings out how Warner was an innovator in the game, loving trick plays, but also devising strategies to take advantage of the smaller but speedier Indian teams against larger foes in an era when smashing into the line of scrimmage and sheer brawn and violence was the norm.

Third, she brings the team and drama to life in some of its biggest accomplishments and its biggest games. Maybe the most storied game of the Carlisle Indian team was its defeat of Army in 1912, only 22 years removed from the Army massacre of Indians at Wounded Knee. The Carlisle team featured Jim Thorpe, and the Army team included Dwight D. Eisenhower. The Indians won and had a great trick play. Read about it.

Finally, she follows the later careers of the players on this team. Some went on to serve in the U.S. military, including World War I. Others became successful in law or business. Yet others went home and become militant agitators for Indian rights. Not something Pratt had in mind, but their independence and intelligence was also something instilled in them at Carlisle.

This is a fabulous, well researched, and well written history of a forgotten team. It is a piece of history that goes beyond sports and beyond football. I highly recommend it.

karen dowey says

Good book lots of history. Interesting history on the way college football started and how it evolved.

Good book lots of history. Interesting history on the way college football started and how it evolved. Ivy league rivalry from back in the beginning of the sport is very interesting.

Robin says

This book is about a football team made up of American Indians that did amazingly well from 1893-1917. The team contained such stars as Jim Thorpe (player) and Pop Warner (coach).

I liked it because it was also about the fate of American Indians in general. The US government continually didn't meet agreements made with the natives, taking their land and giving it to white Americans. They took Indian children away from their parents and "educated" them in boarding schools, where they learned only white American ways, in addition to scholarly subjects. I liked reading the personal stories of those to whom this happened.

Before reading this book, I hadn't realized that Jim Thorpe, one of the greatest athletes in the world was Native American. I had heard about Pop Warner football programs, but I didn't know anything about who Pop Warner was.

Overall, this was a good history book about Indians and this Carlisle Indian football team. The author was a bit long-winded, so parts of the book were slow; therefore, I only gave it 4 stars instead of 5 on Goodreads.

David says

This is a book about "cowboys and Indians," from a very unique approach. It describes many of the 19th-century issues and battles that arose as the "white man" pushed the native Americans off their lands and onto reservations. I learned some things in this section that I was not aware of.

But all of that is presented as context for a fascinating experiment - the idea of off-reservation boarding schools to educate the Indians. Particularly, the "Carlisle Indian Industrial School" in Pennsylvania is investigated in great detail, with a particular emphasis on the astonishingly successful football team that was

formed there.

This was during the formative years of college football (early 1900s) when the sport was pretty brutal - frequent serious injuries and even regular fatalities. The Carlisle Indians team was trained to be very disciplined and restrained, and then to be very innovative in the game - they "pioneered" the use of trick plays, misdirections, and the downfield passing game; and they dominated over the "ivy league" schools that were the college powerhouses of that era. We're introduced to one of the most remarkable athletes of all time, an Indian named Jim Thorpe.

This is a fascinating look at both some very interesting aspects of American history that I had no idea were related in any way.

Ron says

Finally a book I could finish. This was a decent account of the history of Carlisle Indian College, in particular the Football teams at the college. I found the information about Captain Pratt, the first superintendant of the college, the most vivid parts of the story. The story of the football players, except for Jim Thorpe, seemed too brief, but that is probably due to the limited amount of information available about most of the players. The description of the football seasons could have had more of a ESPN feel to it to make it more entertaining. But overall I enjoyed learning about a brief period in college football history that I knew only through the brief period that Jim Thorpe attended.

Megan Bowers says

2018 Reading Challenge: A book about or involving a sport.

Brian O'Leary says

Great book about Indians in college sports, Jim Thorpe et al

Emily says

I LOVED this book, and you should read it even if you've listened to Sally Jenkins on Radiolab.

More review to come!

Mari Mann says

Even if you don't care about football, this book is a great read about the Native American children sent to the Carlisle Indian School around the turn of the century, and how the boys on the football team (including Jim

Thorpe, one of the best athletes ever) competed against and defeated the big name ball teams of the time: Yale, Harvard, Princeton, etc. Well researched and well written.

Don says

One of the best compliments I imagine an author can receive is 'Why hasn't this book been written before?' Jenkins has done her research well and the result is a captivating, well written account of the mistreatment of and ultimate assimilation into American society of native Americans. It also chronicles the evolution of American football and tells the story of how an Indian school ultimately changed the game. Outrageous, sad, inspiring, educational and always interesting, this was a fun and educational read and should be on anyone's list who enjoys football and is interested in Native American history. Great read.
