

truths about our national character, our human nature, our past, and our future. But most are momentary diversions, easily forgotten. All but the avid fans of Ripken and Sandberg would put *Iron Man* and *Second to Home* in the latter category.

*Christopher Moinet*

Dick Vitale with Dick Weiss. *Holding Court: Reflections on the Game I Love*. Indianapolis: Masters, 1995. 271 pp. \$22.95.

John Feinstein. *Winter Games*. Boston: Little, 1995. 277 pp. \$21.95.

In his Introduction, Vitale stresses his "passion and enthusiasm" for basketball, and what ESPN viewer couldn't sense that in listening to the typical Vitale commentary? However, I felt less than enthusiastic about this book. Filled with tributes to coaches such as Krzyzewski, Richardson, Sutton, Pitino, Wooden, Knight, and, of course, Jim Harrick (of the great 1995 tourney run); crammed with pencil-thin sketches of "PTPers" (of course, Michael Jordan gets inked in); stuffed with recommendations for improving the game—pay the college players, deemphasize SAT scores, move back the 3-point line—this book left me feeling like I should have skipped eating that late-night burger and fries. Basketball-junkie junk food. Know what I mean?

Vitale admits he's been accused of being too pro-coach in his views, and this book won't change those complaints. Of course, Knight doesn't always throw tantrums and Sutton hasn't always left programs on probation, but Vitale provides too many excuses for my taste. On coaches, I was most interested in his descriptions of how John Thompson, John Chaney, and Nolan Richardson worked against prejudice to be where they are. But Vitale is best when describing his coaching days at Detroit University. I liked learning that Dickie V. organized a paintathon to redo the school's seats by getting free student help when the Athletic Department only had enough bucks for paint and brushes. Move over, Tom Sawyer. And every pre-season scrimmage should be like the one he also organized at Detroit, highlighting a 24-hour card of amateur ball featuring local ex-standout athletes. Hey, Kansas and the other "late-night" scrimmagers, you *can* learn something from this guy.

The pressure to recruit and win or get the "ziggy" from your local AD is amply covered by Vitale in this book, with only small concessions that media-hype in the form of sports talk shows, recruiting-guru newsletters, and web-site chat groups, not to mention books like this one, fuel that pressure more and more. It's too bad he spends so much time defending coaches—too many NCAA restrictions, too many expectations, too many complaints that they earn too much dough—while mostly blaming the fans, and sometimes the players, "hotdogs in search of relish." A good example of a spoiled fan, though, is the one who allegedly congratulated John Wooden after UCLA won the NCAA in 1975 (their eighth in nine years) by saying, "Congratulations, Coach. You let us down last year, but this helps make up for it."

Vitale does know basketball. He picks Kentucky to win it all in 1996 and points out Jim Boeheim deserves more respect: "the fans never let him forget finishing second [in 1987]. Now he's branded." Ouch. Let's finish second again, please!

Vitale also makes interesting reading when describing the recruiting wars, such as the one involving Stephon Marbury (Cremins vs. Tarkarian). He has "no problem" with corporate sponsorship, shoe company money, high-school all-star camps and the like. But he condemns the "street agents who are wheeling and dealing young kids."

Is it so clear where the wheeling and dealing begins?

Feinstein's mystery dramatically portrays the kind of recruiting wars, above and below board, that Vitale only hints at. This is the second mystery involving reporter Bobby Kelleher, who was a political reporter in *Running Mates* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), but it's Feinstein's first sports mystery. It's an enjoyable read, but, like so many sports mysteries, the solution of the crime is disappointing.

The plot centers on the pursuit of Rytis Buzelis, a Lithuanian emigre playing for Shelter Island High School and being heavily recruited by every major school, but the top contenders are "Minnesota State" and "the University of Louisiana." Kelleher, a former bench rider at Virginia, combines his sports connections/knowledge with his political reporter's nose for dirt and follows the money. Natural suspects for non-NCAA-sanctioned action are the Louisiana head coach, Fred Murray, "living proof that crime does pay" and, to borrow Vitale's phrase, a "street agent" with connections, Miles Akley, "chief bagman" for Murray and the Brickley sports equipment company, "wooing the kids first with free shoes and clothes and equipment, becoming their pal, then promising them that if they [go] and [play] for Coach Murray, a lucrative Brickley contract [will] surely await them when they [turn] pro." When an assistant coach from Minnesota State, and friend of Kelleher's, turns up dead at one of the games, the fun begins. And before Feinstein's done, we even suspect other shady character types, a mover/shaker sports announcer named Nick Angellini—a "not nearly as lovable Vitale wanna-be"—even Rytis' controlling wheeler/dealer father. Great stuff, huh? Yeah, for most of the way.

Feinstein sets the scene on Shelter Island well, from the morning coffee group of sports and town pundits at the country club to the packed-in-a-tiny-gym-with-famous-coaches atmosphere of Rytis' high-school games. Madison Square Garden is also a setting for the novel with nice local-color touches: "Seeing the Knicks' championship banners from 1970 to 1973 brought back memories of his dad taking him to see those great teams when he was a little boy."

But Kelleher has to solve a murder, and with the help of the local Shelter Island reporter, Tamara Mearns (could there be love?), and other reporters (no cops, please), they eventually do. The plot manipulation gets heavy. To name one: let's tape a recorder under the floor of a local restaurant after four or five people help manipulate the meeting to seal Rytis' commitment to a school, *and* let's have money explicitly discussed at the meeting. And by the way, make sure it's at just this one table. Thomas Hardy, Charles Dickens, get in line.

The solution? It's not the shoe dealer, coach, pushy father, jealous sister, or even a vengeful mother. Are you kidding? The fans! The fans are always the villains, aren't they? Time to turn off the TV and read a . . . the Universal Baseball Association? At least there's a reason for blaming J. Henry Waugh! He invented the whole thing.

*Phillip Wedge*