



The Miracle of St. Anthony: A Season with Coach Bob Hurley and Basketball's Most Improbable Dynasty

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In a city mired in endless decay, where the youth suffer through all the horrors of urban blight, hope comes in a most unassuming form: a tiny brick schoolhouse run by two Felician nuns where a singular basketball genius takes teenagers from the mean streets of Jersey City and turns them into champions on the hardcourt. Coach Bob Hurley had been working miracles at St. Anthony High School for over thirty years, winning state and national championships and offering his players rescue from their surroundings through college scholarships, when he met his most dysfunctional team yet. In **The Miracle of St. Anthony** Adrian Wojnarowski follows Hurley through a gripping and heartrending season as he struggles to lead a troubled team to glory through his unparalleled understanding of the game and his ceaseless determination to see no more children lost to these streets. In **The Miracle of St. Anthony**, acclaimed sports journalist Adrian Wojnarowski follows Hurley through a gripping and heartrending season, as he struggles to lead a troubled team to glory through his unparalleled understanding of the game and his ceaseless determination to see no more children lost to the city streets.

The Miracle of St. Anthony: A Season with Coach Bob Hurley and Basketball's Most Improbable Dynasty Details

Date : Published January 19th 2006 by Avery Publishing Group (first published 2005)

ISBN : 9781592401864

Author : Adrian Wojnarowski

Format : Paperback 390 pages

Genre : Sports and Games, Sports, Nonfiction, Basketball



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Erin Miller says

Until the last chapter, this was a 3 star book - it never really captivated me, but held my attention long enough to finish it. But the resolution I expected in the final chapter never came. 300+ pages of waiting to hear if these kids fixed their lives and the answer is TBD? Maybe the author should have waited a few years to publish so that there were answers.

Daniel Bondi says

This book was a biography of Bob Hurley, but it was the best biography I ever read! It takes us into the inner city New Jersey where we learn to love a basketball team that I honestly never thought would win. Not only was this book a real page-flipper, but it also taught me some key values of life in an uplifting way. After every mistake a character in the book makes, they always find a way to get back up. At some points in the book I laughed, other times I cried, but I will always love this book. Thank you to Adrian Wojnarowski for a fantastic novel.

Suzanne Hamilton says

I loved this book, partly because I know the setting, but also because it tells a truly miraculous story. Back in the 1980s we lived in Jersey City, just a few blocks from this struggling parochial school where Bob Hurley was already working his magic. I'm no basketball fanatic, but I was hooked on this saga.

Hung Tran says

This is not just a book about basketball, it's a book about Jersey City and the life that entails. It's a book about poverty, class, values, and the ability/inability obtain the American Dream. Through Bob Hurley's tenacity, we can all learn and be motivated in our daily lives, beyond basketball.

Upon finishing this book, I was truly sad to find out that St. Anthony had already played their last game as the school finally closed its doors this past year. St. Anthony, Bob Hurley, and its players will continue to live on.

Michelle says

I can't remember ever finishing a book and immediately going online to donate money. I donated to a

Catholic school no less when the most generous religious description of me would put me on the outskirts of agnostic. Not to mention, the son of this book's subject is a basketball player I've always despised. I have changed my opinion.

Bob Hurley is the longtime basketball coach of a down-and-out Catholic school in sketchy Jersey City, New Jersey. This place is so bad even the associated church cuts its ties with it. It has something going for it, though: its basketball tradition and at the helm its coach Bob Hurley. To say the school survives only because of him is not an exaggeration. It is a fact. This man could've taken any number of lucrative higher level coaching contracts and he's stayed. He is the best, the absolute best, at what he does. He's mean and a tough son of a bitch but there is not a person who loves his job (or, really "calling") more. There is not a person who has a bigger impact by simply doing his job.

It does get a little too detailed at times, even for this sports nut, and it's a large cast of characters to keep track of. I did end up doing quite a bit of googling afterward (always a good sign) and had to laugh that the only person in this I didn't root for eventually transferred to my alma mater to play basketball. This is ironic given the crappiness of my college's team.

Overall this book is extremely inspiring, moving, and wonderfully done. Bob Hurley inspires more than just the players, it's everyone around him. A big time lawyer leaves his job for less than a living wage just to be around him. And the basketball-loving nuns are great! Bob Hurley is one of a kind, as is this book. If I had a teenage son who played basketball I'd totally want him to go to St. Anthony, not to become a great player, but to become a great human being.

Kate says

Hurley's story - and by extention, that of St. Anthony's - is amazing and inspirational but I found the book sort of long-winded and too repetative to really enjoy.

Chris says

"The Miracle of St. Anthony" reminds me of "A Season on the Brink" by John Feinstein. While the books are about two basketball coaches, Bob Hurley and Bob Knight, driven to achieve excellence for their programs, Hurley of St. Anthony's emerges as the more human and altruistic. The books recount entire seasons with the coaches which enables you to be with the team through the ups and downs of a season and to live it with the players. But "Season" picks up players careers in college where much of the hard work is behind them and they have made their choices of where, in most instances, they wish to end their playing days. In "Miracle" the players are still works in progress. Sadly, most of these athletes are from the inner city where the basketball court and their skills are the only means of escape from the poverty and gang violence of Jersey City. They must rely on Bob Hurley to be coach and, in some instances, parent to guide them through the many choices in life they face. Hurley doesn't sugar coat it for them. Many athletes do not have a male figure in their lives, certainly not one who will come down on them when they make the wrong choices and make them face the consequences of their actions. This builds up a love-hate relationship between player and coach but you keep rooting for the coach to keep doing what he's doing and for the player to hang on because the experience is worth it and rewarding. So "The Miracle of St. Anthony" is about basketball the way "Moby Dick" is about whaling.". It has a relatively happy ending this year and only

for a handful of kids. But the humanity of Bob Hurley that shows through makes you understand why he is never satisfied with his team's progress in maturing as people and why he is nervous letting his seniors go each year. The lessons they learn in the gym will take them only so far. He hopes they have learned enough about taking responsibility for their choices to carry them through the hard part when basketball ends.

Duffy says

Simply put, the best sports book I have ever read. Unprecedented access for Wojnarowski, and Bob Hurley, Sr. is as compelling a central figure as any author could hope to have. A must for any true sports fan, not just basketball.

Beth A says

Great story about Coach Bob Hurley's successes at a small Catholic School with no money and players from disadvantaged areas of NJ. A bit long.

Aaron Maurer says

I have owned this book for quite some time now and finally decided to give it a read. I am so glad I took the time to read. It was a perfect read for me as I coached through my first year of coaching girls basketball.

I loved reading the struggles and ups and downs of this team as they worked their way to a perfect season. At the end of the day, this book reminded me that no matter where you coach or where you are from at the end of the day kids are kids. The difference is that they all come with many different factors, but when you can strip away all the stresses of life and focus on the game of basketball there is a sense of serenity.

Coach Bob Hurley is intense. He pulls no string and gets to the point. He has high expectations and has found a way for troubled youth to rise to the occasion.

I just really enjoyed reading the journey and getting into the lives of everyone involved. This book proves as a great reminder that there is more to a program and coach than the players and head coach. It really takes an entire community to make things happen.

This was an enjoyable read. Obviously, you are not going to learn drills and plays from this book, but rather a story about how everything comes together to make magic happen. I look forward to finding another book to provide me some motivation and insight.

Rachel says

I'm a sucker for sports stories, but this is probably the best I've ever read. Not only is the writing phenomenal (definitely going to check out Wojnarowski's columns), but the story of Bob Hurley is incredible. The combination of Hurley's discipline, family values, the importance he places on a college education, and his

loyalty to his students is unbeatable. I've always been attracted to strong disciplinary figures and situations, and the story has honestly given me a new perspective of competing interacting with the students I work with. Very inspiring, very moving; I teared up while reading the stories of Hurley's sons and at the end of the improbable undefeated season.

Will Johnson says

One of the biggest debates is whether sports is truly just a game or not. There are those confusing NBA commercials where they say 'basketball is just a game. But sometimes it isn't.' Pro athletes, who clearly represent the majority of basketball players in people's households (due to the exposure, etc), seem to embody this debate mainly because of their large contracts and the seemingly simple nature of their jobs (shoot a ball into a net and go home to a mansion). People forget the endless travel, time away from family, and the intense scrutiny of success/failure.

But even when taking into account all those things, the question still needs to be asked: is basketball, and sports in general, just a game? I've read a trilogy of sorts now, starting with Darcy Frey's *The Last Shot*, continuing with it's unofficial sequel *The Jump*, and now with the sidequel of sorts, *The Miracle of St. Anthony*. A lot of what happens in *The Miracle of St. Anthony* happens at the same exact time as *The Jump* and some of the events are even referenced. . .but there couldn't be a completely different world between the Coney Island setting and Sebastian Telfair's life in the Jump only miles away from the boys in *The Miracle of St. Anthony* in Jersey City, New Jersey.

The question asked in all three of these books is whether sports, and more importantly, the game of basketball, is just a game. In my view, people need to look at the NBA as an elite job (which it is really). People work hard to get that job (just like a business major in college gets their degree and moves up in the world). The time and dedication comes easy for some and not for others but, most importantly, in some areas of the United States, basketball is the ONLY job prospect. Remember, the NBA, and even the college game, is an elite job and only a select few get in. Imagine it as your only option? Your chances in life get smaller and smaller.

And that is the Miracle, indeed, of *The Miracle of St. Anthony*, because in a world where the options are limited for children, and basketball is MORE then a game and a ticket to success or failure, there is a coach named Bob Hurley Sr who takes the lowest of the low (low income, low values, low options, low environment. . .the list could go on) and propels them forward into areas they couldn't imagine being in. The neighborhood of Jersey City is surrounded by negative energy and while Coach Hurley may scream his eyes out at his boys, he also makes basketball more than a game but a choice and lifestyle that leads to success.

St. Anthony, the legendary high school basketball school, is the focus of this book that manages to chronicle more than just the school and it's quest for a perfect 30-0 season, but the lives of a misfit group of kids who, unlike former St. Anthony alumni, seem to be going nowhere and are failing to grasp Hurley's philosophy. The author, Adrian Wojnarowski, does a marvelous job of depicting Coach Hurley through the eyes of the students who fail to understand him. You will read this book's first few chapters and simply say, 'this dude is an asshole'. But as you slowly buy into his philosophy and learn what he's done for all the other kids at St. Anthony over the years, you start to like the guy and realize that a few angry tirades about making a bad pass or missing a free throw is just one tiny part of making the kids, who excel at almost nothing BUT basketball, use their on court success as segways into real life.

The one problem with the book is it's complete failure to grasp time. Sometimes you are not sure what year or day or even game the book is talking about and, through not fault of the author, so many people have the same frickin' name that it gets confusing when a dialogue box goes 'Bob said, Bobby said, Bob said, Rick said, Rick said', etc etc. I was also a little disappointed the book didn't pack a dramatic punch. I felt for the boys in the book, especially the book's saddest case, Lamar Alston, but never really felt compelled to find out what happened to them. The main point of interest is, in the end, Hurley.

Hurley is a weird figure. Even though I warmed to him, I didn't necessarily like his approach to coaching (the fiery kind) though I did realize the amazing things he did for kids in a crappy town with no options. I appreciate the man and SOME if not all of his methods. A reader may be conflicted with how they look at the main focus of the book. If you end up hating him. . .this book will be a long haul. If you are intrigued, like I am, the book is a fun adventure. If you love the guy, then you are in heaven.

The Last Shot is the perfect inner-city Is-Basketball-Just-A-Game? book and it is unfortunate I have to compare books of its ilk to The Last Shot because it really isn't fair. The Jump was a bit passionless but tapped into the professional aspects of basketball and the price of fame while this book tends to focus on the aspects of risk/reward and the idea of role models. The three books together manage to give you a complete perspective, even if it is within a small radius, of life from the streets, to the gym, to even the NBA (complete with success and failure in all areas).

Jeremy says

As inspirational of a sports story as you will ever read! Wojnarowski follows around the St. Anthony basketball team as they try to find themselves, understand a coach who won't ever let them settle for anything but the best and live in a world that gives them nothing.

Coach Bob Hurley understands what it's like living in Jersey City, as he grew up there himself. But he also understands that these kids need to get out of Jersey City. For them, basketball is the way. Hurley is constantly on them, never letting them cut corners or take a day off. While some people might be turned off by how Hurley gets his results, the results none-the-less are very good. He motivates the kids like nobody ever has, and in the end makes them better people for it.

Wojnarowski does a very good job telling the stories of Hurley and the two sisters who have kept St. Anthony going all these years. But also the past lives they have impacted that still comeback to them after all the years. Two of the players Sean McCurdy and Marcus Williams probably have the most fascinating stories of the team.

Patrick Laney says

As good a book about basketball as has ever been written and one that goes well beyond the court. Bob Hurley is a legend in high school basketball but his real legacy is the value he has placed on staying in one place to transform lives for 50 years. "Miracle" is not really a miracle but the telling of old values that still matter in a world that has changed and keeps changing. What does not change is Bob Hurley teaching hardened kids to play man-to-man defense better than any coach at any level that has ever blown a whistle.

Tom says

I'm convinced that there has got to be another way to reach troubled inner-city teenagers than Coach Bob Hurley's preferred method of profanity-laced verbal dressing downs. His style is likely not what I would employ if thrust into a small basketball program in decaying Jersey City.

That being said, there is clearly a method to his madness. This book crescendos from a simply angry Hurley in the opening chapters for whom I felt no real affection, to a Hurley who has succeeded in bringing yet another senior class of basketball players to the pinnacle of High School Basketball. With each page I found myself rooting harder and harder for Hurley's team on and off the court and I started to appreciate that, while somewhat heavy-handed, Hurley's approach to coaching is effective in showing kids that there is in fact a world beyond the small housing projects that they have called home.
