

Book Review: The Chosen Ones: The Team that Beat LeBron

Written by {ga=Demeatloaf}

Thursday, June 14 2012 2:00 PM - Last Updated Thursday, June 14 2012 2:25 PM



On the day that Stony Brook university and Kent State University punched their cards to the College World Series, Tony Meale released his book “The Chosen Ones: The Team that Beat LeBron.” The 372 page book chronicles the improbable run by Roger Bacon Spartans that ended in a defeat of LeBron James and St. Vincent St. Mary in the 2002 state title game.

One thing is clear about “The Chosen Ones” and that is that a lot of time and hard work was put into writing the book. Much of the book is done in an oral history style and is centered around first-hand encounters of the players and coaching staff of the Spartans. There is a good balance of first-person narratives, description of gameplay, background info and explaining what makes all of the characters in the book function the way that they do. In this sense, it reminded me of Terry Pluto’s great book “Forty-Eight Minutes,” which chronicles a regular-season game between the Boston Celtics and Cleveland Cavaliers in 1987. In addition to statistics, Meale gives thorough descriptions of the feel of the games played and what is going through the mind

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of each player. Reading the segments that outline gameplay is not like reading a box score.

Much of the story centers around the late Roger Bacon coach Bill Brewer. A tough-nosed and no-nonsense coach, Brewer took the fledging Spartans program and turned it around using his brand of Xs and Os coaching and personal accountability. Brewer was a family man and that extended to the way he approached his coaching career. He was very tough on his players, but it was only done so out of love. Bill Brewer pushed his players to the edge only because he believed in them and wanted them to succeed as much as they possibly could.

Every good story has a highs and lows. An example of that paradox is that Bill Brewer passed away about five years after the Spartans won the state championship. Tony Meale sets the table by starting the book off with the story of Bill Brewer's life leading up to his death. As the reader, you get a feel for what he meant to the community, team and most importantly, his family.

The story of the 2002 Roger Bacon team is incredible, but it wouldn't be half as interesting without the cast of characters involved in it. When reading the book, you start to feel like you actually know these guys and were a part of what they accomplished. I don't say this to diminish what a great feat it was, but to give credit to the massive amount of work that Tony Meale did writing the book. When racism rears its ugly head and changes small forward Frank Phillips' life forever, you feel sorrow for him and carry it around with you. When Josh Hausfeld discusses how he uses the fact that he beat LeBron James as an icebreaker for his sales profession, you feel proud for him and suddenly want to buy what he is selling.

Tony Meale was successful at portraying LeBron James in a fair way. The thing I really liked about the LeBron James angle is that there were times where it reinforces what we as Cleveland fans don't like about the him and other times where you really like him and want to see him succeed. For example, he did not bother attempting for the jump ball in the first match up between Roger Bacon and St. Vincent St. Mary's presumably because he did not respect his opponent. Before the second game the two teams played, he guaranteed a victory that he could not deliver on. James also did not pay attention to his coach Dru Joyce during the final game. These are all anecdotes that do not come as a surprise to Cleveland fans who have been paying attention to his career for the past nine years. There are also moments in the book where James is a good sport when running into Roger Bacon players after that fateful game that paint him in an endearing way.

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"The Chosen Ones" offers a glimpse into the psyche of Roger Bacon. The same cannot be said of the film "More than a Game" and the book "Shooting Stars." When told that a team of scrappers beat LeBron James shortly before he went first overall in the 2003 NBA draft, the obvious reaction is to think that it was an upset. That thought is not so obvious after reading the book. Whether or not the game was an upset doesn't matter. The fact that the players on the team were absolutely convinced that they would win does. They looked at The Chosen One's 2002 Sports Illustrated cover and effectively told him where to stick it. This is the ultimate "Nobody Believed in Us" story and it is told eloquently. There are moments of joy, tragedy, overcoming impossible odds and even mortality. With the book being setup with Coach Bill Brewer's death, it gives the reader a different perspective throughout the entire storytelling process.

The champion Roger Bacon Spartans are a team whose legacy is beating LeBron James. There is so much more to the story and this book immortalizes it for basketball fans. Whether you love or hate LeBron James, this is a fascinating look at a team whose sum was greater than all of the parts.

"The Chosen Ones" is Tony Meale's first book, and if it is any indication, he will have many more to come. It is available for purchase at www.thechosenonesthebook.com