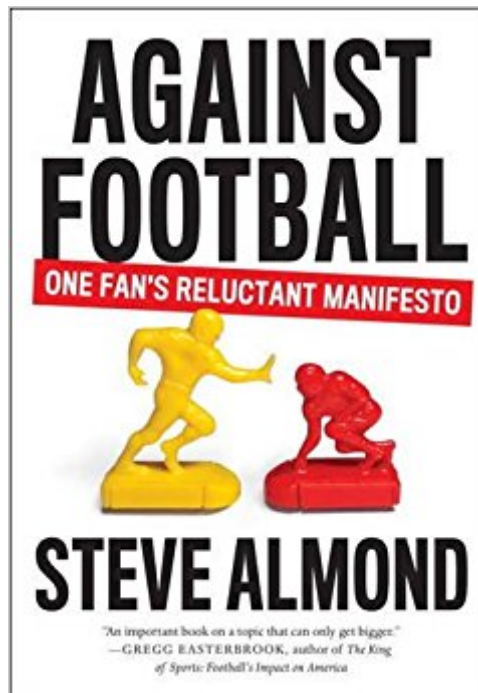




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# Against Football: One Fan's Reluctant Manifesto



## Synopsis

A New York Times Best Seller—“Powerful...an important read.” —Publishers Weekly  
New York Times bestselling author Steve Almond takes on America’s biggest sacred cow: football. In *Against Football*, Steve Almond details why, after forty years as a fan, he can no longer watch the game he still loves. Using a synthesis of memoir, reportage, and cultural critique, Almond asks a series of provocative questions: Does our addiction to football foster a tolerance for violence, greed, racism, and homophobia? What does it mean that our society has transmuted the intuitive physical joys of childhood—run, leap, throw, tackle—into a billion-dollar industry? How did a sport that causes brain damage become such an important emblem for our institutions of higher learning? There has never been a book that exposes the dark underside of America’s favorite game with such searing candor.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A longtime devoted football fan, Almond spends much of the first quarter of this book solidifying his football bona fides before beginning his onslaught of reasons that he feels he can no longer watch his favorite game. These arguments are familiar—concussions and sub-concussive hits; the game’s twisted monetary incentives; its cult of violence; racism; and its vexed relationship with the American capitalism and patriotism. But the sheer weight of the evidence is impressive and hard to ignore. Even when Almond’s arguments seem strained, he is able to put the burden of proof

squarely on readers to disprove him with more than a simple dismissal. Particularly strong is his complete demolition of the argument that the mere popularity and fixity of the game somehow puts it above criticism. Many football fans will react with derision, and many non-fans will consider his points self-evident: both are wrong. These are arguments that deserve to be considered deeply and grappled with, and teens who have not yet devoted their lives or opinions to or against the sport are in a perfect position to take Almond's manifesto seriously.

Mark Flowers,  
John F. Kennedy Library, Vallejo, CA --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"Almond is dead serious: Supporting a spectacle that causes brain damage is immoral." New York Times Book Review "[Almond] is a very good writer, and his analysis of problems confronting the game today is well done." Washington Post "Almond is a shifty cornerback of a writer: rangy, sarcastic, offbeat. And every once in a while, he'll blindside you with a big hit." New York Times "An unapologetic, frontal assault on the game's role in American culture." Los Angeles Times "Steve Almond's blistering book *Against Football: One Fan's Reluctant Manifesto* is exactly what it advertises itself to be: an exasperated, frustrated, wide-ranging argument that the time has come to abandon football particularly but not exclusively the NFL as a sport built on violence, racism, economic exploitation of poor kids, corrupt dealmaking with local governments over stadiums, and a willingness to find it entertaining to watch people suffer brain damage." Linda Holmes, NPR "A devastating multi-pronged attack." Newsweek "Powerful... Almond is a sympathetic narrator, his evidence incontrovertible, the moral authority firmly on his side." Harper's Magazine "A passionate and elegantly written book that finally overpowered any rationalization I could come up with to justify watching more football." New York Times, Dealbook "A helpful and thoughtful read that traces the criticisms of the game and the men who run it." Bitch Magazine "In Steve Almond's, *Against Football*, a book filled with 'obnoxious opinions' by the writer's own admittance and they're not that bad Almond makes a case for the fact that football, and the NFL specifically, is at the root of a toxic, pernicious, deadly and deadening culture in America. The book came out on August 26th, and it's taken a mere two weeks for Almond to be proven right on a national scale, in the ugliest of fashions." Flavorwire "Against Football is a book that kicks and prods and fights with itself and ourselves. Almond is asking himself and us to drop the ironic distance, open our eyes, and truly look at the dangerous, vile, beautiful, fun, highly corrupted, and horrifically

corrupting corporate behemoth we spend so much of our money and leisure time enraptured by, and know what it is that we are doing, and what we are supporting." — The Millions — "Steve Almond's slim but muscular broadside slams into the wall of sanctimonious hokum served up by the NCAA, NFL, and their sycophantic sportswriter enablers." — PopMatters, Best Nonfiction Books of 2014 — "[Almond's] persuasive book dares fans to consider how long they can continue to ignore football's obvious flaws in order to preserve their weekend ritual." — Barron's — "Almond doesn't pretend to have all the answers, but sometimes it's enough to raise the right questions at the right time. Against Football does that with disarming humor and humanity." — National Memo — "What a perfect chance to take a breath, look around, and push the endeavor in a better direction." — Open Letters Monthly — "This book is an important first step towards a more compassionate and educated discourse on what is, unfortunately, a game many of us are entertained by and deeply invested in." — AskMen.com, Recommended Reading for September — "Against Football...makes a strong case that football, as presently practiced by the NFL and NCAA, should be reformed or abolished." — Oregonian — "[Against Football] brilliantly states the case for radical change to save the sport." — Albany Times-Union — "A book that's part journalism, part memoir, part cultural harpooning." — Kansas City Star, FYI Book Club selection — "Against Football is clearly the pick of the litter: funny, pained, profane and sharp as a November Saturday in Ann Arbor." — Tampa Bay Times — "Almond covers all of the arguments against football...He has sworn off the game. Will anyone join him? As he notes, boxing was once this country's top sport." — St. Louis Post-Dispatch — "Pitch-perfect | Against Football is, at bottom, a love letter from a heartbroken fan, notable for his eloquence and clarity. It's easy to imagine that this pungent critique, with quotable passages on nearly every page, could be a much-needed game-changer. If that's overly optimistic, then we'll have to settle for a first-rate piece of journalism and a great read." — Portland Press Herald — "Almond's book is slim but potent... Almond makes his case in a style that is conversational, self-deprecating, sharp and often laugh-out-loud funny." — Plain Dealer — "There are no easy answers found in Almond's book — and it's an intentionally provocative argument being made, obviously — but what it surely does is get you to think about what you're doing on Sundays, what you're paying to watch and how we could possibly let children play the game." — Las Vegas Weekly — "It's an indictment, a self-excoriation, and a provocative analysis of why so many

Americans are hooked on this organized violence." — Tampa Bay Times — "Almond makes it impossible for us to ignore our willing participation in this corrupt and destructive pastime... Against Football is one fan's inflammatory, yet indispensable, voice in the current conversation about the state of football in America." — Brooklyn Rail — "Those who don't care for the U.S.'s favorite fall sport might be inclined to pick up Steve Almond's Against Football, looking for validation of their position. Those who love the sport may be drawn in by its subtitle, One Fan's Reluctant Manifesto, for similar reasons. Almond's power lies in his ability to speak to both readers." — Shelf Awareness, Great Reads Now in Paper — "If you want to continue to enjoy watching football as you have in the past...you should particularly never read Steve Almond's Against Football: One Fan's Reluctant Manifesto." — Utah Daily Herald — "As a gesture of respect to a genuine 'critical eye', I am donating my copy of Almond's remarkable book to the Cascade Public Library, so anyone can witness a moral person making a painful, moral decision." — Cascade Pioneer (Iowa) — "As coiled and sharp as a scorpion's tail... A top-notch interrogation." — Electric Literature — "Almond (a New York Times bestselling author and lifelong Raiders fan) writes beautifully and thought-provokingly about his decision to give up watching a game he loves because of all the bad stuff that goes along with it." — Made Man — "Almond's book is a tremendous read, as all of his work is, but more than that, it's an important one, and one that leaves you slightly queasy the next time you set your fantasy football roster." — Pop Culture Beast — Nonfiction November Picks, Entomology of a Bookworm — Publishers Weekly Book of the Week — "A welcome addition to the conversation." — Shelf Awareness — "Many fans of football will react to this book with derision, and many non-fans will consider his points self-evident: both are wrong. These are arguments that deserve to be considered deeply and grappled with, and teens who have not yet devoted their lives or opinions to or against the sport are in a perfect position to take Almond's manifesto seriously." — School Library Journal — "Those who don't care for the U.S.'s favorite fall sport might be inclined to pick up Steve Almond's Against Football, looking for validation of their position. Those who love the sport may be drawn in by its subtitle, One Fan's Reluctant Manifesto, for similar reasons. Almond's power lies in his ability to speak to both readers." — Shelf Awareness — "A brilliantly quotable, carefully constructed, emotionally vulnerable tract sure to anger as many as it convinces, he argues against the sport's many sins even as he thoughtfully examines its hold on the souls of the faithful." — Booklist, starred review — "A provocative, thoughtful examination of an astonishingly brutal sport |

Comic, compassionate and thought-provoking. — Kirkus

Reviews — “Powerful — Almond is drawing on his own experiences as a fan to illustrate how difficult the problem, which provides the book with an engaging personal angle that will lure readers who are mature enough to hear him out whether they agree with his conclusions — An important read, even if as Almond concedes, it offers more questions than answers. — Publishers Weekly Praise for Steve Almond — „s Candy Freak: — “This book will, yes, make you hungry, but it will also make you grateful—for wit, for self-effacing humor, for joyful obsessiveness, for the precise and loving use of language to crack open and celebrate our oddness—in short, for a writer as funny and big-hearted as Steve Almond. — — George Saunders — “I got a real sugar rush and cluster headache reading this bittersweet book by Steve Almond—joy, the sugar daddy himself. — — Amy Sedaris From the Hardcover edition.

Reading this book can serve as something of a litmus test. I've seen no critic — — I use the term loosely — — actually engage his arguments. Mostly they are flinging ad hominem non sequiturs. Those who react strongly against it — — including the many who have flamed, insulted and aggressively mocked Almond in public forums — — come off looking like reflections of the flawed culture he identifies. Critics react with unthinking passion, unleashing mouthfuls of pejoratives, often questioning Almond's manhood or sexuality in bemusingly "male" term. For example, suggesting he possesses female genitalia reveals an essential misogyny; suggesting he must have a "big vagina" — — seriously, it's a thing among his critics — — is just stupid, a transparent and reflexive attempt to overlay deeply ingrained male insecurities and obsession with size. Make no mistake: Almond is a true fan of football, especially of — — as we say in Broncos country — — "the hated Raiders." But he's also a thoughtful man who sees the stark contradictions and dubious ethics of supporting our modern civic religion cum blood sport. He focuses a good deal of his manifesto — — for it is that, rather than a deeper research project — — on the problem of brain injuries, but he identifies other, very real issues: misogyny, hyper-machoism, militarism-jingoism, rich owners fleecing and blackmailing taxpayers, tribalism over what is really little more than (in his words), "brightly colored laundry," the obvious disconnect between a highly professionalized (though its players are unpaid!) professional football farm system being connected to institutions of higher learning, the incredible amount of time invested in passive observation, and more. As a life-long fan — — my father took me to my first college game at age 6 and I

still hold those season tickets and, try as I might, I've never successfully been able to avert my gaze from the game. I find Almond's manifesto persuasive and damning. Even before I read it I had resolved to, shall we say, reduce my "using" of football this season: I'm not going to every home game for my college team and will limit watching football on TV. I have always loved watching the game, but I intend to learn how else I might spend that time. This is four stars rather than five because I think Almond would have better served his purpose by investing more effort and turning it from manifesto into a more substantive, documented piece of research.

Steve, as no doubt revealed in these pages through wit and wisdom, reveals his VERY real struggle with the ongoing football concussion crisis. Question is: will anyone take this well-documented admonition seriously or will we cast this thorny issue aside or, worse, pretend that it doesn't exist at all? I, like Steve, am a lifelong devotee of this violent, brutal game that is American football. I can't promise a clean break because, like SO many, football has become one of our all-consuming addictions. Unless we live under stone, football's promotions are everywhere and stoke our excitement to watch and watch and..... More than this, heartwarming traditions surrounding viewership has infiltrated us. We HAVE to watch because what would we do while everyone is at Uncle Billy's house watching the "BIG" game. They are all "BIG" games, aren't they? The NFL Marketing machine would definitely want us to believe this. What Steve says here needs to be said for the better of the game. It would be VERY hard to imagine these United States without football but we can't, also, allow brutality on this level go unrecognized either.

As a long-time Charger fan, it wasn't until a couple of years ago that I stopped watching. Something didn't feel good about it and I was definitely shaken by Junior Seau's suicide. Now I really know why I stopped watching. This book tackles the issue of football from every angle--violence, brain damage (concussive and scarily, sub-concussive), misogyny, homophobia, racism, etc. It made my heart ache to read it. Not sure how anyone who reads "Against Football" could look at the sport the same way again. Which means many will probably hate this book without reading it, as the book will definitely threaten existing opinions and expose an irrational need to hold onto the sport by presenting some devastating, inconvenient facts.

Good discussion and raises a needed awareness about the health and societal consequences of repetitive brain concussions in modern sports! Unfortunately, this message is watered down by the writers tangential journey's into homophobia, tyrants, slavery and evils of big money! Not saying

these other area's don't need awareness brought to them but would have liked to see this one stay on the health subject and another set of books with more depth into all the rest. I'm sure there's a lot more to the stories that could have been developed if that had been the strategy!

I recommend this book for anyone concerned about the physical and mental toll of playing football and the social and moral implications of consuming it. It is essentially an overview of the key objections to the various levels of football, youth, high school, college, and pro. It serves as a good starting place to further readings on the topic.

After reading "Against Football: One fan's reluctant manifesto," I won't be watching or attending football games at any level.

Eye-opening, informative, and especially credible given the author's deep passion for the game.

A thought-provoking book that made me re-think the American football industry.

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