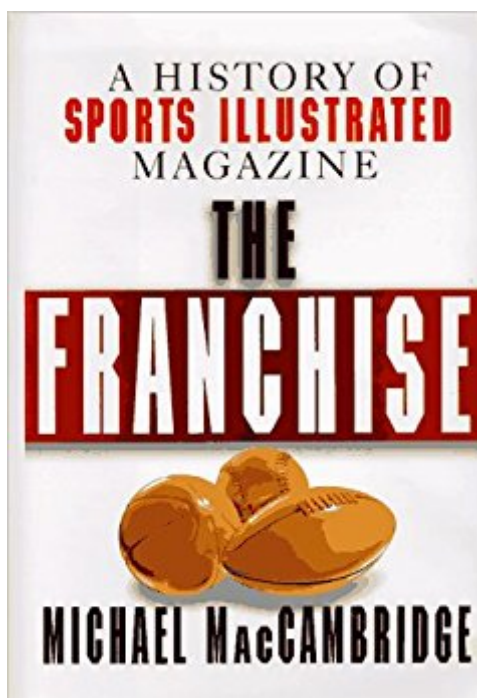


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The Franchise: A History Of Sports Illustrated Magazine



Synopsis

"I think over the years, it legitimized sports. All of a sudden, you could read a sports magazine, and still be considered able to read, for starters." -- Ray Cave

Sports Illustrated magazine is one of the great publishing success stories of the past 50 years -- a pop cultural phenomenon that has grown into a financial monolith, generating profits of more than one billion dollars since 1984. But if its success seems inevitable in retrospect, you don't know the whole story. Launched by Time Inc. patriarch Henry Luce in 1954, SI was for years dismissed by many mainstream sports fans as a snobbish, upper-crust magazine. One writer called it "a slick cookbook for the two-yacht family." But in the late '50s and early '60s, SI's prose was altered and enlivened by a new breed of smart, irreverent sportswriters, who were unapologetic about the central role of sports in modern society. They worked under legendary managing editor Andre Laguerre, the hard-drinking Frenchman who instilled SI with a breadth of vision that no sports magazine had ever possessed. From that collaboration emerged the blueprint for modern sports journalism, as well as the quintessential middle-class American magazine of the postwar era. The period also saw the debut of the controversial swimsuit issue, still the highest profile special issue in American magazine publishing. Laguerre's transformation of the magazine -- which largely took place in a series of small, untrendy bars in midtown Manhattan in the '60s and '70s -- is one of the great untold stories of American journalism. It features a superb team of larger-than-life sportswriting legends like Dan Jenkins, George Plimpton, Frank Deford and Roy Blount, Jr., as well as cutting-edge photographers like Walter Iooss, Jr. and Neil Leifer. *The Franchise: A History of Sports Illustrated Magazine* is the first book to tell the story, documenting the development of one of the most fascinating and dominant franchises in all of American sports, from its obscure beginnings to its present-day prominence. Filled with never-before-told inside stories about the game behind the games, it's a book for anyone who cares about sports, good writing and the high stakes world of modern media business. Michael MacCambridge worked for eight years as a columnist and critic at the *Austin American-Statesman*, writing about movies, music, and popular culture. He lives in St. Louis with his wife, Danica Frost.

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Customer Reviews

The Franchise recounts the story of an industry joke that went on to become one of the most successful magazines in publishing history. Under the visionary leadership of managing editor André Laguerre, Sports Illustrated--launched in 1954--continually pushed the envelope, revolutionizing color printing in the process and making the careers of an immensely talented group of writers and photographers. Author Michael MacCambridge analyzes editorial and marketing strategies, including the infamous swimsuit issue, and profiles most of the key players--with an emphasis on the crack team of sportswriters that has included such talents as Dan Jenkins, Frank Deford, and Rick Reilly.

Believe it or not, there once was a time when Sports Illustrated didn't do a swimsuit issue and readers didn't get a free gadget for subscribing. MacCambridge, a onetime pop culture reporter, chronicles SI's evolution from its shaky start as a snooty publication covering too many yacht races and polo matches to its present status as the leading sports journal in America. Based on over 300 interviews with former and current staffers, it offers an inside perspective, crammed with blow-by-blow accounts of the office rivalries and schemes that shaped the magazine. Profiles of renowned sportswriters like Dan Jenkins and Frank Deford are included, along with those of managing editors Andre Laguerre and Mark Mulvoy, who were instrumental in developing the magazine. MacCambridge also examines the print and electronic competitive challenges SI has faced, and, of course, he covers the story behind the swimsuit issue as well. Essential for all public libraries. Peter Ward, Lindenhurst Memorial Lib., N.Y. Copyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Years before ESPN, Sports Illustrated defined the nature of sports in America. Founded in 1954 by Henry Luce of Time, SI started as a magazine devoted primarily to upper class activities like polo

and yachting. Author Michael MacCambridge deftly traces the history of SI from that moment, through the editorship of Andre Laguerre, the hard drinking force behind the movement to make SI a magazine about the "sweat sports"--football, basketball, baseball and track--on into SI's glory years before the advent of ESPN in the 1990s. Along the way, MacCambridge shows how Sports Illustrated redefined sports in the 1950s, shifting from an attitude of jock worship to a more cynical and realistic modern view. He also includes interesting profiles of some of the magazine's legendary writers like Dan Jenkins, Tex Maule and Frank Deford. Having written some about sports in the fifties (HOOP CRAZY: COLLEGE BASKETBALL IN THE 1950s), I found THE FRANCHISE to be an enjoyable and informative contribution to both the history of sports as well as the history of journalism.

Great book, super low price. SI had a shaky start with lots of boozers, but they survived and now may face a new challenge: ESPN.

If you love SI and ESPN you love this book.

The negative reviews of this book seem unwarranted to me (and, would it be fair to assume, largely from one particularly bitter reader?). MacCambridge can write, he's done his homework, and he has in fact made a number of interesting observations. Even though I disagree with many of them (e.g., his inordinate fuss over Dan Jenkins), I find it hard to discount anyone who recognizes SI for the "wildly profitable, mass-market magazine best known for its swimsuit issue" it's become. If your reaction is "yeah, so what's wrong with that?" don't bother with the book. If, on the other hand, you'd be interested to learn how a magazine which used to commission such engaging prose on everything from elk hunting to college wrestling matches to major league baseball became the narrowly-focused, crass exercise in corporate branding it's today, and how it's coped with ominous developments like the Warner merger, ESPN and the baffling rise of Rick Reilly - don't let the pithy criticism put you off. Granted, the book does drag in spots, and would almost have benefited from some more energetic editing (and a few more photos of the cast of characters), but it's a welcome change from the obsequious, mass-market stuff which typifies sports-related journalism today. I would have increased my rating by another star had the publisher bothered to produce a more imaginative (and sympathetic) cover.

With SI opening up its back issues online in March 2008, MacCambridge's "The Franchise" is worth

another look at the creation and evolution of the magazine. The sections on Dan Jenkins and Andre Laguerre are great reads and would fit well in the traditional "bonus" piece section of SI that Laguerre created as editor and Jenkins often filled. The major misconception seems to be that this book is about sports. It is about sport journalism. If you know that going in, you should be pleasantly surprised. SI was widely recognized as the best written journal of its kind, actually the prototype of the "New Journalism." The writers in the 1960s and early 70s were kings. But, after Laguerre's sacking, eventually the power turned to the managing editor, particularly the mentally unstable Gilbert Rogin and the talent-challenged Mark Mulvoy. Pictures replaced words, image replaced talent, and SI seized being a must read. Fascinating, fascinating stuff.

Michael McCambridge has provided me the inspiration to check my local library, find all the back issues of SI, and read them cover to cover. The author proves what every die-hard sports fan and SI reader has known for years; that SI is the best magazine on the stand. He provides an exhaustive recount of the terrific writers that SI has employed over its lifetime, such as Jenkins, Deford, Blount Jr., Plimpton, and even Kurt Vonnegut. McCambridge fully details SI's transition from the 1950's to the 1990's and presents the magazine's alleged departure from literary quality during this decade. Not only is this book an evenhanded and accurate review, it is an easy read. Any lover of sports and good writing will want more of SI. A great job!

While doing a research paper on the history of SI I came across *The Franchise*. It was just what I was looking for. Being only a college student I had no clue how important SI was to the sporting culture in America. MacCambridge has done his research and this seems to be a very scholarly piece on something that generally is not too scholarly. It was a bit long but isn't it better to do more work than not to have done enough. I can't think of one issue about SI that MacCambridge didn't cover in this book. I am fortunate to have this book because it helps my research for my senior thesis.

Try as I did, I barely made it thorough this dry, rather unimaginative history. What insights it provided were hardly worth making. Better to subscribe to the magazine, which is not, as the author maintains, on the creative downside. Deford, Jenkins, et al. were no prose giants. In retrospect, they were lucky to have access to a vehicle that would print their second-rate blather. I much prefer today's writers. They're funnier, write more crisply and take sportswriting for what it is - entertainment.

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