



When Pride Still Mattered : A Life Of Vince Lombardi

By David Maraniss

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In this groundbreaking biography, David Maraniss captures all of football great Vince Lombardi: the myth, the man, his game, and his God.

More than any other sports figure, Vince Lombardi transformed football into a metaphor of the American experience. The son of an Italian immigrant butcher, Lombardi toiled for twenty frustrating years as a high school coach and then as an assistant at Fordham, West Point, and the New York Giants before his big break came at age forty-six with the chance to coach a struggling team in snowbound Wisconsin. His leadership of the Green Bay Packers to five world championships in nine seasons is the most storied period in NFL history. Lombardi became a living legend, a symbol to many of leadership, discipline, perseverance, and teamwork, and to others of an obsession with winning. In *When Pride Still Mattered*, Pulitzer Prize-winning author David Maraniss captures the myth and the man, football, God, and country in a thrilling biography destined to become an American classic.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

As coach of the Green Bay Packers from 1959 to 1967, Vince Lombardi turned perennial losers into a juggernaut, winning back-to-back NFL titles in 1961 and 1962, and Superbowls I and II in 1966 and 1967. Stern, severe, sentimental, and paternal, he stood revered, reviled, respected, and mocked--a touchstone for the '60s all in one person. Which adds up to the myth we've been left with. But who was the man? That's the question Pulitzer Prize-winner David Maraniss tackles. It begins with Lombardi's looming father, a man as colorful as his son would be conservative. Still, from his father Vince Lombardi learned a sense of presence and authority that could impress itself with just a look. If a moment can sum up and embrace a man's life--and capture the breadth of Maraniss's thoroughness--it is one that takes place off the field when the Packers organization decides to redecorate their offices in advance of the new head coach's arrival: "During an earlier visit," Maraniss reports, "he had examined the quarters--peeling walls, creaky floor, old leather chairs with holes in them, discarded newspapers and magazines piled on chairs and in the corners--and pronounced the setting unworthy of a National Football League club. 'This is a disgrace!' he had remarked." In one moment, one comment, Lombardi announced his intentions, made his vision and professionalism clear, and began to shake up a stale organization. It reveals far more about the man than wins and losses, and is the kind of moment Maraniss uses again and again in this superb resurrection of a figure who so symbolized a sporting era and sensibility. --*Jeff Silverman*

From Publishers Weekly

In the history of American sports, no coach has been mythologized as much as the Green Bay Packers' Vince Lombardi (who has been immortalized with, among other tributes, a rest station on the New Jersey Turnpike). Yet this fine biography from a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter for the Washington Post is a blast of cool air among the usually overheated roster of sports biographies. From Lombardi's formative years as a player and coach at Fordham University through assistantships with West Point and the Giants and, finally, to his tenure as head coach of the Packers, Maraniss presents a portrait of a complicated human being who was a great teacher but a mediocre listener, an effective psychologist despite being rife with flaws. Though he often got hurt as a college athlete, Lombardi, as a coach, scorned players who couldn't withstand injury. His relationship with his wife and children was less than ideal. But Maraniss doesn't succumb to any reductive assessments of Lombardi as "tragic" or "heroic." As legend suggests, Lombardi was indeed a great motivator, but his success also derived from a cerebral approach to the game. The book's true punch comes from its myriad subplots: a hero from one small town (early 20th-century Brooklyn) revitalizing another in the Upper Midwest, or professional football and Lombardi coming into their own at roughly the same time. Maraniss spends far too much time on people and events whose influence on Lombardi isn't made apparent, and he relies too much on other sportswriters' descriptions of games. Yet like its subject, the book, for all its flaws, is intricate, ambitious and satisfying. First serial to *Vanity Fair*.

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From Library Journal

Clinton biographer Maraniss's rich, resonant, and grown-up biography of Green Bay Packers coach Vince Lombardi is full of the kind of surprises good research can yield (e.g., his New York butcher father had work and play stenciled philosophically on his hands). The book transcends the sports world, much as its iconic subject eventually did. (LJ 8/99)

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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