



## **Soldiers First: Duty, Honor, Country, and Football at West Point**

*Joe Drape*

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**Bestselling author Joe Drape reveals the unique pressures and expectations that make a year of Army football so much more than just a tally of wins and losses.**

The football team at the U.S. Military Academy is not like other college football teams. At other schools, athletes are catered to and coddled at every turn. At West Point, they carry the same arduous load as their fellow cadets, shouldering an Ivy League-caliber education and year-round military training. After graduation they are not going to the NFL but to danger zones halfway around the world. These young men are not just football players, they are soldiers first.

*New York Times* sportswriter Joe Drape takes us inside the world of Army football, as the Black Knights and their third-year coach, Rich Ellerson, seek to turn around a program that had recently fallen on hard times, with the goal to beat Navy and "sing last" at the Army-Navy game in December. The 2011 season would prove a true test of the players' mettle and perseverance.

Drawing on his extensive and unfettered access to the players and the coaching staff, Drape introduces us to this special group of young men and their achievements on and off the field. Anchoring the narrative and the team are five key players: quarterback Trent Steelman, the most gifted athlete; linebacker Steve Erzinger, who once questioned his place at West Point but has become a true leader; Andrew Rodriguez, the son of a general and the top scholar-athlete; Max Jenkins, the backup quarterback and the second-in-command of the Corps of Cadets; and Larry Dixon, a talented first-year running back. Together with Coach Ellerson, his staff, and West Point's officers and instructors, they and their teammates embrace the demands made on them and learn crucial lessons that will resonate throughout their lives—and ours.

## **Soldiers First: Duty, Honor, Country, and Football at West Point Details**

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## From Reader Review Soldiers First: Duty, Honor, Country, and Football at West Point for online ebook

### Sanchi says

O.k. so i won this on goodreads from firstreads. I thought the book was extremely well written, almost too good. I had to re-read through parts of it to fully understand what was going on. I loved the idea that this group of soldiers gave an insightful view on how much they sacrifice to be able to hold up perfect grades on top of playing some very competitive games of football, and being soldiers for our country. These men show an extraordinary skill of tolerance, and also patience if you ask me. I did love that this book lets us as readers see a real view of what our soldiers go through to protect this country. I also loved the characters in the book, and absolutely loved that they had quotes from the characters of inspiration at the top of the beginning of each chapter. I thought the characters were well thought out and loved the excitement of the final game against the navy. I would recommend this book to anyone and would especially recommend it for school age kids, maybe middle school or early high school. This book has the ability to send a great message to our younger population and I hope that teachers incorporate this into their syllabus' So that's my thoughts on the book. I rated it 4 out of 5 stars It deserves it!

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### Samantha Plotkin says

[ The ending of the book was somewhat anticlimactic - its not Drape's fault that Navy wo

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### Hal says

This book about Army Football at the United States Military Academy at West Point offers up a different perspective on college game in a number of ways.

A timely book as we again come into a new season. With the scandals of Penn State, Ohio State, and others usually dominating the sports news Joe Drape reveals a side of the college game we don't hear much about. One based on dedication, discipline, and personal sacrifice, what Army football is about.

He takes us through the 2011 season for the Black Knights. A season that was filled with promise and expectation for the Cadets and their coach. It did not turn out as they had hoped with a number of losses that were brought about with sloppy play and many turnovers or close fought battles that just came up short. Culminating in the bitter loss to Navy that again just fell short and for the tenth time in ten years caused them to sing first in the closing tradition of the game.

Aside from the description of the games Drape goes into the lives of some of the key players for Army. Why they were there, how they got there, and what they had to face at the institution. He also covers the personal struggles of such things as character building and honor. Things not much considered in the general game of college football today. Among many of these things I learned about life at Army with the high attrition rate of Plebes who just to get there had to meet such high standards. The Army football player takes this on and more. Something not seen in the recruiting process that is so vital to the big money, high profile schools and the game that college football has become.

The most important thing I felt he brought to focus in this book was the level of commitment it takes to not only to survive then succeed but ultimately what it means for the future of these Cadets beyond the football field. A five year commitment that for many will take them to the real battleground of war where that commitment is their very lives. No college football program aside from Navy and Air Force attaches that type of commitment. And Army graduates are really on the front line as they are truly the boots on the ground.

I had not generally paid much attention to the football program at West Point beyond the traditional Army-Navy game that most college football fans would take note. A well written account of one aspect of this historic institution, Joe Drape got me to think about more than just the game. I will follow closely now to see how this season unfolds. Some of these players will again return to dedicate themselves to the task at hand on the field and what is to follow beyond. I am now a fan.

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### **Kristina says**

As someone who doesn't follow football or the military, I was interested in this book simply because the people that fight for our country *do* hold a special place in my heart even if I'm not up-to-date on what's going on out there. What makes a soldier intrigues me. How they go through such grueling training. What inspires them? So I entered the giveaway, and won.

All that being said, this book was amazingly easy to follow, even for one so out of the loop as me. I was inspired by the team's attitude and determination. Knowing now just a tiny bit of what the men and women at West Point go through I dare say I have even more respect for them than I did before hand. God bless you all.

GO ARMY!

\*\*\* I received this book for free through Goodreads First Reads \*\*\*

\*\* The Giveaway was Listed By Henry (of MacMillan books) \*\*

\* I received my copy on Sat, Aug 11 2012 \*

THANK YOU GOODREADS FIRST READS AND HENRY!

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### **Dave says**

Okay book. Second book by the author. For some reason I find kind of fascinating stories about the US Military academy. Have other better books about West Point but the author was passionate about the story of the 2010 Football team at the Academy. You fall in love with some of the athletes portrayed in the book, and learn to respect and admire the commitment they have made to our country.

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### **Lizz says**

This should be required reading for all college football fans.

ETA 1/3/15: I just reread this book for work (it's January's book for my nonfiction book discussion group at the library) and this time I have a little more to say. I stand by my 2013 "review": this book should be required reading for college football fans. But I would just as soon recommend it to non-football fans, too. While there are play-by-play breakdowns of several Army football games from their 2011 season, the book is about so much more than football: it's about the young men (and women, but since the book focuses on the football team, primarily men) at the United States Military Academy and all that entails. It's about their drills, their Plebe year, their classes and training, their triumphs, the 500th Night ball, Branch Night. It's about these young men making a commitment to duty and honor and becoming the best second lieutenants they can be... all the while playing Division I football. Their hard work in all facets of their lives is admirable, even if you don't really care about football. The passion - from the players, coaches, administration, and the author - is palpable and you'll find yourself chanting "Go Army! Beat Navy!" even if you've never watched a game.

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### **Marc Friend says**

The book started out very good and had me hooked. Once I got to about chapter 6 I found myself getting bored with the tiny details of all the different stories which made it difficult to finish the book. I pushed past it and finished overall not a bad book. Just the tiny little details had me bored.

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### **Ellison says**

The author's son becomes interested in West Point football so the day culls a book deal from his publisher to share tales of undersized ballplayers who do not garner any attention from big time college football so they go to the military academy for two years of free education. If they stay for four years they have to do five years of military at which point they flee for the private sector. Thirty percent retention rate.

Occasional insight, emotion, and famous people are mentioned. B/W images, swearing.

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### **Jeffrey Hughes says**

21-25 credits a semester along with a full schedule of practices and games, not to mention all the cadets responsibilities. #driven

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### **Tom says**

Really gets behind the scenes of life and football at West Point. It's hard not to admire and respect these young men. The author, though, perhaps goes too far when he starts referring to them by first name. All in

all, an entertaining and informative read.

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### **Chris says**

I'd read Joe Drape's other book on Kansas high school football and had to read this one about West Point football's 2011 season. Same formula as Joe immerses himself into the lives of the team. Seen it, heard it, lived it, nothing new here for me as I'm a USNA grad (the enemy who is a brother) but it was told with passion and intensity just like the other book, so much so that even I was cheering them on (except for when they played Navy).

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### **Jim V says**

Interesting read about being a scholar, leader, soldier and if time allows playing a little bit of D1 football. These guys play for the love of the game, but know they are in school for a much greater purpose.

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### **Troy Jordan says**

This book taught me that there's more to life than football. If you go to West point then you go to become a soldier not a football player. if you want to be an athlete you need to go to a regular school. Coach Eric built a special team this year and got what he wanted, to sing last.

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### **Priscilla Melchior says**

Anyone who loves college football has been mourning for the past few years as power after vaunted power has been humbled by scandal. Division I sports is reeling under the weight of investigations at schools such as Penn State, USC, Auburn, Miami and the University of North Carolina, with no end in sight.

Enter New York Times sportswriter Joe Drape and his latest offering, "Soldiers First: Duty, Honor, Country and Football at West Point." If Drape gets his way, we'll all view the Black Knights of Army as white knights — scrubbed, honorable and dedicated but undersized competitors charging into the teeth of very large, talented opponents, daring to think they can win.

Off the gridiron, these athletes are the same men who'll loom large one day on the real battlefield, and there's not a snap or a block, a punt or an interception that approaches the gravity of their lives after the cheering stops.

If ever there was a stirring story to be told, this would be it.

Using the 2011 football season as the backbone of his book, Drape introduces us to a group of players who've had their own ups and downs at West Point. Weaving their stories in through a game-by-game recollection of the season, Drape gives us glimpses of their harried, difficult lives as cadets and athletes at the world's most prestigious military academy.

He reminds us that the glory days of Army football — its Heisman Trophy winners and its national championships — are distant memories, but he encourages us to join in believing that Head Coach Rich Ellerson can restore Army to its rightful place in college football lore.

It is an uphill battle. This head coach, Drape rightly reminds, sits across from recruits' parents with the reminder that, after graduation, their sons will not be headed for the NFL, but likely for the front lines of war.

The book strums all the heartstrings as the reader is pulled from heartbreak to hope, game by game, and stirred to deep admiration for undersized players who personify selflessness on and off the field. But it fails on many technical points.

While we do learn of numbers related to attrition rates, honor code violations and even coaches' salaries, we miss much in the way of specifics on the lessons Drape is trying to share.

Though he spends much time sharing generalities about the exhausting demands of life at West Point, he misses his opportunity to follow one player through one excruciating day, showing the push and the pressure. Though he spends plenty of time acquainting us with Head Coach Ellerson and the unbelievably high standards to which he must adhere, Drape spends no time offering perspective, whether from former Army coaches or others in the Division I game.

We do meet former Army players who went to war. Some returned with horrible injuries, some not at all. We get a brief glimpse into what an athlete brings as a wartime leader, but one-on-one conversation with former players and their reflections on how West Point football shaped their futures is missing.

In short, Drape seems to have forgotten the old reporting adage, "Show, don't tell."

"*Soldiers First*" will be a staple on the bookshelf of Army fans, Army alumni and former players. They won't miss what's not there; they've lived it. One wishes the reader could, too.

I won a free Advanced Reader's Edition of this book through LibraryThing's Early Reviewers program.

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### **Blake Knudsen says**

Read this book a while back when I had aspirations to be a Pointer. This is just a great read on the soon to be officers of the Army, who ultimately are not just playing college ball, but going on to serve this great country. Great read!

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