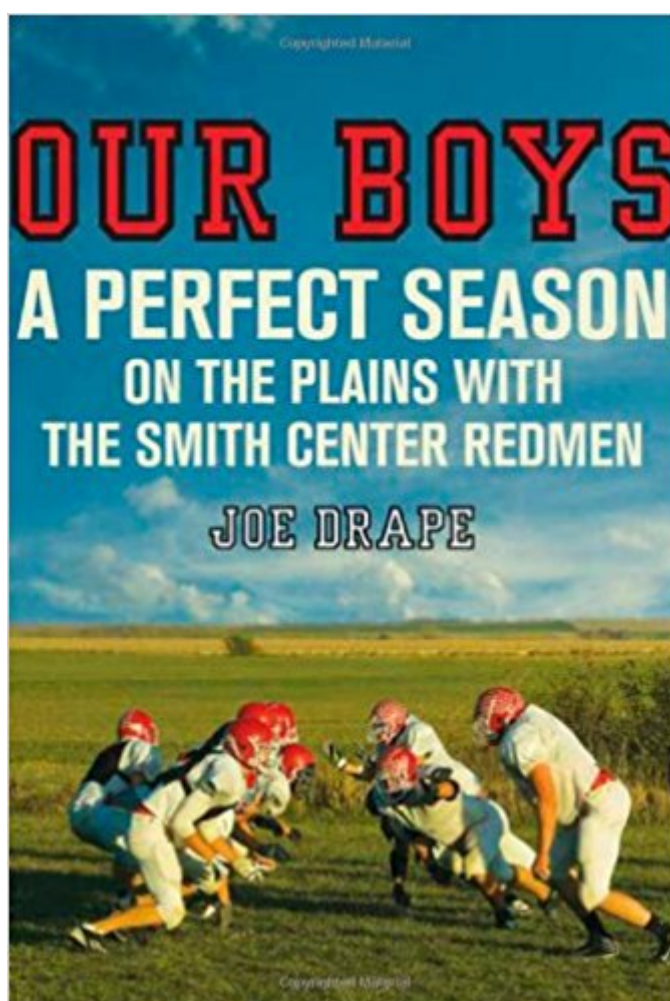


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# Our Boys: A Perfect Season On The Plains With The Smith Center Redmen



## Synopsis

The football team in Smith Center, Kansas, holders of the nation's longest high-school winning streak, embrace a philosophy of life taught by their legendary coach, Roger Barta: "Respect each other, then learn to love each other and together we are champions." But as the Redmen embarked on a quest for a fifth consecutive state title, they faced a potentially destabilizing transition: the greatest senior class in school history had graduated, and Coach Barta was contemplating retirement. In Smith Center—population: 1,931—this changing of the guard was seismic. Hours removed from the nearest city, the town revolves around "our boys" in a way that goes to the heart of what America's heartland is today. New York Times sportswriter Joe Drape moved his family to Smith Center to discover what makes the team and the town an inspiration for miles around. And in a new afterword, Drape returns to Smith Center to chronicle even greater challenges as the streak enters its sixth year.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Although Drape traveled to the Midwest to chronicle a record-setting high school football season, the tale he spins ends up being one that transcends athletics, a story of adolescence and smalltown life. Smith Center, Kans., is a sleepy locale 90 miles from the nearest McDonald's, a place with more windmills than people. But it's also home to Kansas's biggest football powerhouse, a team that entered the fall of 2008 with 56 straight victories and four consecutive championships. From the opening practice to the Redmen's final game, Drape flawlessly paints a picture of how Smith Center achieves perfection year after year. More importantly, he delves into the individual stories on the

team: the tough but kindhearted coach who built a dynasty from nothing; the sure-fire college prospect; and the assistant coach's son, trying to live up to his father's legacy. All the while, Drape details the friendships he develops away from the field with the parents and other townspeople, and the mutual joy they bring the Redmen. With a clear sensitivity toward the difficulties facing the Smith Center players, along with more than a dash of humor, Drape gives the reader a team worth rooting for. (Aug.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

“If you want to turn away from the high-voltage auctioneer babble that surrounds big-time, big-money sport, take this trip to Smith Center, Kansas, with Joe Drape. This is organic stuff, a fat and healthy slice of unadulterated American life. Simply terrific.” — Leigh Montville, author of *The Big Bam* and *At the Altar of Speed*

“Our Boys delves into the heart of America in a manner that reminds me of *The Last Picture Show* and *Friday Night Lights*. Joe Drape crafts a terrific tale that will make you laugh, cry, and think. This is a story about small-town America that will make you shout.” — Jim Dent, author of *Twelve Mighty Orphans* and *The Junction Boys*

“Joe Drape tells the remarkable story of the Smith Center Redmen, not only their success in winning football games, but also in swelling pride for a community and building character in young men. He shows that Roger Barta and the people in Smith Center are winners in every sense of the word.” — Bob Stoops, head coach, University of Oklahoma

“Joe Drape has caught something deep and beautiful in *Our Boys*. It is true to the reality of life on the plains, much more than another football story.” — David Maraniss, author of *When Pride Still Mattered: A Life of Vince Lombardi*

“A great read for all, but even more so for big-city readers to get a taste of the quality of life and genuine caring of this small community and its revered teacher, mentor, and coach - Roger Barta. It is not so much a story about football but about the true meaning of midwestern values, family life, and the spirit of small town Kansas and its special people. I couldn't put it down.” — Bill Snyder, head coach, Kansas State University

“A feel-good story of youthful drive, great coaching and the value of unflagging communal support.” — Kirkus Reviews

“The tale [Drape] spins ends up being one that transcends athletics, a story of adolescence and smalltown life. . . . From the opening practice to the Redmen's final game, Drape flawlessly paints a picture of how Smith Center achieves perfection year after year. . . . Drape gives the reader a team worth rooting for.” — Publishers Weekly

“Hoosiers' on a football field.” — New York Post

“The most improbable, unabashed love story I've read in years.”

“A compelling story expertly told.”  
Pat Forde, ESPN.com

This is a must read for every coach, music director, and others that work with groups of children, in addition to the children themselves. It sounds corny, but it is heartwarming and inspiring...true story of boys in a town with a population of only 1900 that won 67 consecutive football games & 5 state championships. Easy enough reading even for those busy kids in your home that hate reading, and you'll love it too (good readers at 4th grade level could do this). Be sure to talk to each other as you progress through the book and take advantage of the chance to use "teachable" moments. Success happens for kids (especially boys) when they are actively part of a group with a positive mission and a terrific plan IN ADDITION TO THE GUIDANCE OF ADULTS who aren't too afraid or "tired" to model what needs to be done, and consistently follow through! Laughter & tears...excitement...hope...inspiration...motivation. READ IT!

The genesis of this tale can find its origin in a typical football season with an atypical football game. It was then the Smith Center Redmen scored 72 points in the first quarter of a game. This was a feat never before accomplished, and it grabbed national attention - including the attention of New York Times sportswriter Joe Drape, who traveled to the small Midwestern town for the story. What he discovers is a story beyond that mere single quarter of football. Those seventy-two points was more than just a fluke that dropped onto a hapless Kansas team one football Friday night. There was a football program in place established on character-building as opposed to grossing a litany of wins. And interestingly enough, while the community of Smith Center was building character within their boys, their boys were winning games - a lot of games. Every game played for the prior four seasons. Four consecutive state championships. Four consecutive perfect seasons. The longest winning streak in the nation. How? What was going on in Smith Center Kansas? Drape decided to move his family there for a season to find out. The result is this wonderful book. From my own perspective as a true cynic towards the worlds of sports since the era of strikes and lockouts and free agency galore, I appreciated the integrity of the game being returned to its true roots. Drape's writing infuses substance into the game by telling the story of the people along with the town in which they reside. He even is able to develop a bit of suspense into the outcome of the games (though 'perfect season' rests squarely on the book's cover) granting accessibility to even the most lethargic of football fans. This is a story for all who see value in the Midwestern way of life. Read it today, and then share it with your big-city friends.

This book was not just a story of a winning football program - it was a story of a coach making a difference in the lives of student athletes, their families and a town in the center of the United States. Found the story intriguing about the Smith Center Redmen but also found the "story" of the author uprooting his family to move to Smith Center, Kansas from New York to write the book very interesting. What a life changing experience for him and for his young family. The book was well written (and edited). Do not think the reader has to be a football or sports fan to enjoy the book-it is really about life and "blooming where you are planted"! Would highly recommend this book for everyone-especially Father's Day presents.

Love this story.

great story on the success of redman football

I am not a football buff. I am the wife of a football buff who busies herself in the garden during the onslaught of games each fall. However, this book may have changed all that. Joe Drape weaves a story of the passion, dedication, persistence, grit, family, and pure love surrounding the sport of high school football in Smith Center, Kansas. He took me back to my high school days, Friday night football games, the joy of winning and all of the experiences in between. His play by play descriptions helped me better understand the game. However, this is not just a story about football. It reminds the reader about the incredibly talented leaders who have committed themselves to high school teams, not just in Smith Center, Kansas, but across the country. I will read this book again. I will recommend this book to others and truly expect that it will make its way into the Best Seller's Top Ten list. It is that good!

Growing up in Phillipsburg Kansas, arch rival of Smith Center, I learned the value of a days hard work, trust in people, honesty, forgiveness, love and support of an entire community. That was many years ago but this book shows those values still exists and are as pure as ever. Though I've been away for almost 30 years, this book brought me back to my old home in northwest Kansas where I was born, raised and played high school football during the '70s against the Redmen, Blue Jays and Eagles. It made me realize how much we all had in common and still do. I gave this book to my wife and teenage son and said "read this and you'll understand why I am who I am." Read this book. You'll treasure the story. More than that you'll want to instill the ethics, values and love "our

boys" and "our coaches" have.

I've bought and read hundreds of books from over many years and this is the first that I felt moved to write a review on. I think that anyone who has children, coaches sports teams, lives in the city or suburbs, or longs for a stronger sense of community and a simpler way of doing things in our fast-paced world may want to read this book. I was slightly skeptical before buying the book, worrying it would be too overdone and really hoping only to read about an amazing football season. But reading about Coach Barta's coaching methods, his message, his impact on the players and town, and his dedication was inspiring and eye opening. I've spent a lot of time reflecting on the book and how it does or could apply to me and for that I think it's worth its weight in gold.

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