



Athlete for Hire

Lou Saulino

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In the fantastical novel Athlete for Hire, a college sports wunderkind is approached to play on three separate professional teams at one time.

Lou Saulino's rollicking novel *Athlete for Hire* is about a professional athlete who excels in three sports.

In college, Marc plays baseball, basketball, and football at such a level that he could go pro in all three. After appearing on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* and being projected to be the next Jerry Rice or Mickey Mantle, he catches the eyes of three general managers of sports teams, all of whom work for Scott, a millionaire real estate developer who owns their Atlanta clubs. Scott begins to wonder if it's possible to have Marc play for all three teams.

Tracking the owner and the athlete in parallel story lines, the book plots out the logistics of how Marc could play all three sports at once. It wanders through logistics as their seasons overlap; it also notes that playing year round would result in much higher wear-and-tear and risk of injury than normal athletes face.

The narrative splits its time between Marc's efforts on the field and Scott's teams' front office strategies. Its treatments of both are brisk. However, the book is unrealistic to excess, straining credulity with developments such as a sports writer surprise-interviewing players at a pub after a game, and following as teams trade for their needed draft picks with uncommon ease.

Additionally, other people comment on Marc's physical attractiveness quite often, and his performances on the field face little resistance. The result is an uninspiring wish fulfillment tale. People's exchanges are just as unnatural: they deliver inside jokes on repeat, and most of these jokes are awkward; they exhibit bravado to such a degree that their language is contrived. There's also a cringe-worthy level of innuendo at play, even in corporate work spaces, where the vulgarity reads as anachronistic.

Further, the book's characterizations rest in tropes of star athletes, dutiful girlfriends, and inquisitive reporters. Most of the cast is static. An effort to add depth to Marc's back story with a survival tale from his childhood is broached via a casual interjection; because of his dispassionate tone, though, the revelation is flat. Further, there's little exploration of the impact that the event had on his psyche.

While the prose is clear, it is also surface level, itemizing details like what people order at restaurants, or the terms of Marc's contracts. These specifics are too formal to hold interest. And the story progresses toward a conclusion that's been so telegraphed throughout the book that it is unexciting by its arrival.

In the fantastical novel *Athlete for Hire*, a wunderkind is approached to play on three teams at once, positioning him to become a sports hero for the ages.

JOSEPH S. PETE (April 30, 2022)

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