



Landon: A Memoir

Landon Donovan

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In the soccer star's memoir Landon, the dark sides of fame and grueling athleticism are elucidated with clarity and care.

Soccer star Landon Donovan's complex memoir *Landon* is about dealing with depression in the spotlight.

Donovan, a twin, grew up desperate for his absent father's attention. He took solace in sports. Indeed, soccer was both an outlet and a distraction from his complicated home life.

When he was sixteen years old, Donovan made the national soccer team. Later, he declined a full-ride offer from UCLA to train at the IMG Academy in Florida. His career flourished thereafter. He also married, divorced, and had a depressive episode. Right before the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, he was pulled from the team; he faced the disappointment with help from his wife and his therapist.

The chapters oscillate between Donovan's formative years and his more recent victories and challenges, as where a recounting of his removal from the national team is followed by information about his childhood in southern California. Still, though they jump between the 1980s and 2010s, their progression is easy to follow; dates and ages are marked well, and the transitions are fluid.

Though it includes some exciting recreations of games ("As the ball finds its way into the net, Keane cartwheels towards the fans in the southeast corner of the stadium, and pandemonium ensues"), the prose sometimes hyperfocuses on the facts at the expense of style, proving accessible if unadorned. For instance, soccer-specific terminology is defined in context, widening the book to unfamiliar audiences; at the same time, the reflections on Donovan's early dating life are quite matter-of-fact, eschewing depth: "I didn't know how to say no, and I didn't have much backbone." Indeed, Donovan's deeper feelings are too often skimmed over, holding the audience at a distance.

Donovan's persistent depression is handled with greater nuance, though. The book centers three major bouts with the disease: after the 2006 World Cup, after his divorce, and after a traumatic hallucinatory experience in Cambodia. Behavioral therapy and balance are promoted in the course of these recollections, with Donovan noting that he turned to breath work and meditation to get through difficult times. Mental health topics are handled in a compassionate manner, too: "There should be no shame in seeking help," the book insists. Here and elsewhere, the dark sides of fame and grueling athleticism are elucidated with clarity and care, making for satisfying reading.

The understated but spirited sports star's memoir *Landon* is about achieving success in soccer and dealing with depression concurrent with worldwide fame.

JENNIFER MAVEETY (April 2, 2026)

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