



## Clarion Review

Sports & Recreation

### **Make It Count: The Life and Times of Basketball Great JoJo White**

Mark C. Bodanza

iUniverse

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Four Stars (out of Five)

**This revealing and celebratory biography of a basketball player chronicles an accomplished career through thorough interviews and comprehensive research.**

A basketball player who spent the bulk of his career at Kansas University and professionally with the Boston Celtics—two leviathans of their respective level—can be easily overshadowed. Mark C. Bodanza is out to make sure one such player gets his due celebration with his book *Make It Count: The Life and Times of Basketball Great JoJo White*.

Bodanza, a trial lawyer by trade, met White in his law office on business, finding himself reminiscing about White's thirty-three-point performance in the Celtics' triple-overtime win against Phoenix in a 1976 NBA Finals matchup, still considered one of the greatest games of all time. Through a series of interviews and a hefty amount of research, Bodanza's third book was born.

What has emerged is a well-chronicled account of White's life, beginning with his childhood (as the youngest of seven children in a low-income, God-fearing family in St. Louis) and tracing through to his current role in community relations for the Celtics. Bodanza mentions numerous times how it was the principles the youngest son of Elizabeth and minister George White learned that led him to become known for his basketball skills but—as noted in the epilogue—"it is his character that describes far more essentially just who JoJo is."

The book thoroughly covers White's stellar basketball career from high school through an all-American college stint, a gold-medal-winning Olympic Games appearance, and a seven-time NBA all-star professional career that culminated in his jersey hanging in the Boston Garden rafters alongside all-time greats like Bill Russell, Larry Bird, Bob Cousy, and John Havlicek.

While *Make It Count* is thick with factual details from some of White's most important games—including the 1966 NCAA Tournament game in which he was controversially ruled out-of-bounds before sinking what would have been a twenty-five-foot, overtime-buzzer-beating shot in Kansas's eventual loss to Texas Western—it is short on emotion and human interaction. The book borrows some interesting quotes from its well-sourced bibliography to accentuate stories, but modern-day memories and thoughts from White and other key characters are lacking additional narrative and explanation. Considering the book mentions that interviews were conducted with White, his family, former Kansas coach Ted Owens, and Celtics players like John Havlicek, Tom Heinsohn, and Cedric Maxwell, more first-person sentiment would have been a welcome addition to the well-written, fact-based text.

The book also smartly correlates the span of White's career with the nation's racial and political tensions of the times and incorporates White into that narrative. Bodanza writes, "JoJo recalls entering the arena on an away game where the host team's cheerleaders were dressed in ape suits—each bearing the name of one of the African American players of the Kansas team." While potentially shocking for those who didn't live through the 1960s, this is the most blatant of numerous passages that will send readers flipping ahead in a futile attempt to find additional reaction or insight.

A twenty-four-page spread of photographs in the center of the book spanning White's lifetime is an interesting complement to the text. The black-and-white images of White as a young boy and as a grown man embracing his six children help add some of the sentimentality missing from an otherwise complete chronicle of his life.

*Rich Rezler*