



Still Running: The Autobiography of Kentucky's Nate Northington, the First African American Football Player in the Southeastern Conference

Nathaniel Northington

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Still Running tells a true and inspiring story of football and civil rights.

Still Running, by Nathaniel Northington, shares one African American man's fight against racism on a seemingly unlikely battleground: the football field.

Born in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1947—just days before the NAACP addressed the United Nations regarding racism—Northington's life seemed destined for conflict and injustice. Though desegregation was a reality when he enrolled at the University of Kentucky in 1965, he was the first student of color to receive an athletic scholarship—and two years later, in a game against Ole Miss, he became the first African American to play in the Southeastern Conference. But this fortuitous event happened on the heels of his friend and teammate Greg Page's grave injury and death—the two young gentlemen had hoped to integrate the league together.

While these major events of his life are intriguing and engaging, like a good underdog-fights-injustice sports movie, his day-to-day insights are also fascinating. He paints a picture of the hardworking, self-reliant neighborhood he grew up in, and how he learned to be the man he became through the diligent, loving example of his parents. He tells what life was like in the locker room and on campus: tinged with the fun of college and the frustration at the slow pace of social change. The friendship between Northington and Page, forged out of kinship and necessity, makes the book relatable and the events all the more heart wrenching.

The book has a good balance between a memoir's nostalgic quality and a novel's narrative arc—which is no small feat. Northington gives the dramatic and mundane their due time and importance, so the story naturally arises from his remembrances.

In his life and in this book, Northington models immense strength of character. Even in his past and present moments of hardship, he never looks to place blame, and he sees the best in people even in times of conflict. The contrast of the childlike memory and history-making circumstances shows him as both a hero and an everyday man. Northington's faith in God redeems the pain of his story and allows him to share it generously and honestly. While his life drifted away from football to family, his accomplishment remains.

The photos are well rendered, especially given their age; they give the book a homey, personal feel. The captions link them to the story in a professional, well-thought-out manner.

This book is a perfect fit for people inspired by classic sports stories of overcoming adversity, but it finds its true niche among sports fans who see athletics as a vehicle for social change. For them, Northington's voice will be a steady, inspiring guide.

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MELISSA WUSKE (December 10, 2014)

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