

## The Amazing Journey of the Kickapoo Kids: A Novel Based on a Personal Experience

**Paul Lagan**

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*Lagan takes us back to a time when boys played baseball before and after their chores.*

In the epilogue of *The Amazing Journey of the Kickapoo Kids*, author Paul Lagan stands in a now-empty field where his Millersville High School baseball teams of the late 1940s and early 1950s played their home games. “I shake my head, and wonder how many people know just how good this team actually was,” Lagan writes. “Or if they even know the team existed.” Securing the teams’ place in history is the obvious goal of Lagan’s labor of love. A charming glimpse at small-town Wisconsin life as residents adjust to life after World War II is a welcome side dish.

The first-person account follows Lagan—referred to throughout the book only by his childhood nickname, “Bones”—and a group of baseball-loving friends as they come of age in the small villages in the Kickapoo Valley, located midway between Milwaukee and Minneapolis. When they get to tiny Millersville High School, their team goes on three *Hoosiers*-like runs deep into the state tournament, beating teams from some of the state’s largest schools in the process.

In fact, swap basketball for baseball and Indiana for Wisconsin and *Kickapoo Kids* has a very *Hoosiers*-esque feel. Lagan even borrows from one of its most famous scenes when he describes a coach noting the “distance from pitcher’s rubber to home plate” at the state tournament location is the same as back in Millersville. It’s notable, however, that these Kickapoo Kids had a combined record of 32-2 in 1952 and 1953, one year before little Milan High School inspired one of the greatest sports movies of all times by winning an Indiana state title.

*Kickapoo Kids* won’t be confused with a glossy Hollywood script. The text could use a scrubbing by a copy editor to correct spelling, grammar, and continuity issues. Plus, the repeated use of italics to emphasize words that don’t need emphasis is distracting.

But the joy of the book lies in the knowledge that Lagan wrote it based on sixty-year-old memories that he and former teammates shared. And that, as Lagan notes in a disclaimer at the end of the book, “color has been added and license taken on many occasions to bring wonderment to the reader.”

Whether or not it’s superfluous wonderment, sports fans will enjoy tales of the Negro Major League’s Kansas City Blue Birds barnstorming trip through town, and of a local pastor giving up a portion of his valuable farm land to give the kids a place to play ball. Beyond baseball, we meet moonshine runners, evangelists, and gypsies. We experience the proliferation of atomic bomb shelters, polio, and rock n’ roll. We live in a time when fathers work the field, mothers mend clothes, and boys play baseball before and after their chores.

It’s a good time and place to live.

**RICH REZLER** (March 23, 2015)

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