

Watch My Smoke

Eric Dickerson

Greg Hanlon, Contributor

Haymarket Books (Jan 18, 2022)

Hardcover \$26.95 (205pp)

978-1-64259-569-7

Eric Dickerson was one of the best running backs in NFL history, setting a single-season rushing record that still stands. Along with that success, his Hall of Fame career also had its share of controversies. Dickerson addresses it all in his frank, entertaining new autobiography *Watch My Smoke*.

The book covers Dickerson's whole life, from his childhood in Sealy, Texas, through his college career as part of the vaunted "Pony Express" at Southern Methodist University, his NFL career, and his post-retirement life, both in and away from football. Throughout, he minces few words about how college and professional football take advantage of young athletes, and about the racial dynamics at play in the NFL: "The sport that defines me, that gave me some of the best moments of my life and the privilege my kids enjoy now ... also made me so unhappy."

That disconnect drives most of the book. Dickerson recounts key games, but also shares his off-field challenges in ways that go beyond standard sports autobiographies. Dickerson talks about the infamous car that was purchased for him when he was being recruited out of high school, pursued by football programs that were going to make substantial money off of his success. He writes about the contract disputes he went through early in his Rams career, when he held out and moved home, rather than accept the same low salary that he agreed to before his breakout. He is direct about the racism he faced during his career, opening the book with an anecdote about a former Colts owner telling racist jokes at a team holiday party, and describing both overt and covert bigotry from fans and sports media.

Watch My Smoke is the story of a great athlete who deals with the problematic parts of sports and celebrity, and who does so in an open, memorable way.

JEFF FLEISCHER (January / February 2022)

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