

## ***Journal of Issues in* Intercollegiate Athletics**

### **The Reappearing Act: Coming Out as Gay on a College Basketball Team Led by Born-Again Christians**

By Kate Fagan, Published 2014 by Skyhorse Publishing, Inc., New York (200 pages).

---

Reviewed by

**Doug Blais, Ph.D.**

*Southern New Hampshire University*

---

*The Reappearing Act* is an emotional and heart-felt memoir of Kate Fagan's journey from her first tomboy haircut to acceptance of her sexuality. Fagan pours her heart out to readers in a raw and poignant manner. The book will have readers laughing one minute and being moved to tears the next as Fagan chronicles her journey as a Division I basketball player struggling with coming out as gay.

The book opens with Fagan sitting in the locker room as her University of Colorado Buffaloes are getting ready to take on the North Carolina Tar Heels in the second round of the 2003 NCAA tournament. Unable to sleep the night before, Fagan's mind is racing but it is not because she is nervous about the big game; it is because she is finally coming to grips with who she is. The referee tosses the ball for the opening tip and Fagan is not thinking about tracking the ball down, all she can think is "Holy shit...I'm definitely gay" (p. 9).

The remaining chapters painfully relive how Fagan gets to this point in her life. Fagan's earliest recollection of conformity and gender identities occurs when she is eight years old and cuts her hair short so she will be indistinguishable from the boys on her baseball team and not have to fuss with her baseball cap. Her mother's reaction sets the stage, "My mother, the woman I adored most in the world, began crying. She wasn't sobbing; her shoulders weren't heaving with effort. No, it was much more frightening than that. Water was simply escaping from her eyes. 'It's a boy's haircut'" (p. 14). Fagan had broken one of society's unwritten rules; she made it difficult for people to identify her gender. She recalls, "The lesson I learned that afternoon: Being who I am might make my loved ones cry" (p. 57).

Fagan brings the reader in deeper and deeper, exposing her inner feelings as she struggles to understand her wide-ranging emotions, including whether or not she even likes basketball. She questions her own motives for continuing with the game, and wonders if she is just doing it because her dad was a star hoops player at Colgate and it is "in her blood."

The reader is soon introduced to the "FCA" or Fellowship of Christian Athletes. This is a group of UC athletes that get together to worship God. Although not religious, Fagan joins this group to fit in, and more importantly, because Dee, her best friend and roommate attends.

While the first few FCA sessions were benign, Fagan recalls her feeling of great discomfort upon reading the handout entitled “Overcoming Struggles of the Flesh” with the following struggles bulleted: Sex, Alcohol, Drugs, Pride, and Homosexuality. Fagan writes, “I took a deep breath, hoping the additional oxygen would help calm my heart. My cheeks felt hot, as if the eyes of everyone in the room were on me” (p. 31).

The FCA sessions soon became full bible study sessions where Fagan kept telling herself to “be patient, that eventually faith would come.” Fagan took great pause when the discussion in one session turned to her head coach. “I’ve been thinking about Coach Barry a lot lately,” said one teammate. Fagan received a “pitying” look from the group when she replied, “But Coach is Catholic.” The whispered reply was, “Coach Barry’s lifestyle is keeping her from truly knowing Jesus.” She was then informed that coach kept her lifestyle private because that type of information could hurt recruiting. “We do know that certain sins create a gulf between people and God. And this is one of those sins” (p. 39).

Fagan is introduced to Cass, her first crush, when members of the FCA held an “intervention” to set Cass on the proper road to God. “God gives each of us free will, we make our own decisions. It pains Him when we turn our back on Him. He wants desperately for each of us to find the light” (p. 49). Cass, comfortable with who she is, shocks Fagan when she replies, “I don’t understand a God who says that it’s wrong, evil, for me to love another woman” (p. 49). Cass’ confidence and self-awareness set the wheels in motion for Fagan, “Cass had just exposed the lie, the one I wasn’t even fully aware I’d been telling myself. It was like she had shined a flashlight into some secret compartment inside my heart, and I think I knew that everything packed away in there was about to demand examination” (p. 52).

Fagan’s friendship with Cass grows even as she continues to struggle with her sexuality. One of Cass’ texts to Fagan, “Nothing worth having comes easily,” would have a profound affect on her. This led Fagan to confide in her best friend, Dee, who initially comforted her by saying, “I don’t believe being gay is wrong. I think love comes from God – all love” (p. 87). The approval was short lived, however, when Dee woke her up at 3:48 the next morning to say, “What I said last night was wrong. God isn’t okay with you being gay” (p. 90). Dee would later reconcile their relationship by telling Kate they can still be friends because she can “love the sinner and hate the sin.”

Throughout the book, Fagan muddles forward, just trying to make it through each day. She is unable to concentrate or focus on even the smallest tasks. Fagan recalls one day in class when the professor was not pleased with her inattentiveness and thought she viewed herself as a privileged athlete; “Do you think this information does not apply to you because of that gear you’re wearing? I’m tired of you checking out each time you walk into this room – get it together” (p. 93). All Fagan wanted was understanding. “If she had pulled me aside and asked a simple question – Are you okay” – she would have realized I wasn’t lazy at all, but rather, at that moment, I was having my ass handed to me by life” (p. 94).

Things do not get clearer or easier for Fagan. Over and over, she thinks about the text, “Nothing worth having comes easily.” Fagan decides to take the next step - “I’m so sorry” is the subject line of the e-mail to her fiancé Kevin. Unfortunately, she was not ready to tell him the truth so Kevin is left wondering and seeking closure. Believing this has freed her and will allow her to move forward, Fagan shares the news with Cass and looks to move their friendship to the next level. Cass, realizing how far Fagan still has to go and not wanting to be involved in someone else’s coming-out-process, is not interested in advancing their relationship.

Fagan finally gets up the courage to tell her parents that she is gay. Even though they profess unconditional love to her, she quickly realizes their love was both conditional and complicated, as her parents struggle to accept her sexuality. “We love you so much... But we’re really struggling with a few things...” (p. 181). They proceed to tell Fagan she has been untruthful and has now lost their trust. Fortunately for Fagan, over the next few years the relationship improves as lines of communication become more open.

Fagan continues to move forward, gradually “trying on truth and transparency for size, to see how it fits.” It starts with a text to a close cousin and moves to aunts, uncles, and other cousins – “I’m gay.” Although a long process, Fagan describes how each time she says this, she feels a little lighter, “the burden a bit easier.”

Fagan is now a successful reporter for ESPN. She is also a regular panelist on various ESPN shows. She wrote the book for many reasons and hopes she can help “others struggling with this process.” She would like, in some small way, to “affect change and get people to think differently.” I believe Fagan has definitely done this with *The Reappearing Act*.

This book is well written and a quick read. Parents, coaches, and athletic administrators would all benefit from reading this memoir and gaining an understanding of what it is like for a student-athlete struggling with their sexuality. *The Reappearing Act* would be a great read for any gender studies course or sport sociology class.