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Wounded Lions: Joe Paterno, Jerry Sandusky and the Crises in Penn State Athletics

By Ronald A. Smith. Published 2016 by University of Illinois Press, Champaign, IL.(288 pages).

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Jerry Sandusky's decades-long, child sexual abuse scandal shocked the sport world. When Penn State administrators, including famed football coach Joe Paterno, were found guilty of cover-up, the question remained: how could repeated child molestation have persisted as long as it did so closely tied to an athletic program hailed for its values, academic, and athletic success? In *Wounded Lions*, author Ronald A. Smith chronicles the history and culture of Penn State Athletics culminating with the Sandusky shakedown. A Penn State history professor stunned by this child molestation whitewash, Smith sought to discover how the history of the athletic program could have contributed to this shocking culture of silence. Smith pinpoints organizational structure implications, such as the isolation of the athletic program away from academic units and oversight, the strong and pressured investment in the ideals that the Penn State athletic program was thought to represent, as well as the intrusion of various influential stakeholders prioritizing athletic success over ethics. The text exemplifies the intricate and slow erosion of Penn State's perception versus reality parallel.

Smith provides insight into the "Penn State way" that only an insider could. At the work's essence, *Wounded Lions* explores how well-known issues plaguing intercollegiate athletics manifested specifically for Penn State with an expressive nostalgic writing style that only a long-standing Penn State history professor shaken by one of intercollegiate athletics most impactful scandals could exhibit. Although the description of the Jerry Sandusky child molestation scandal did not include details nor sources beyond what can be discovered via media reports, the book includes a meticulous review of details exploring the history of Penn State football and details the influential roles administrators and external stakeholders played in creating an insular athletic culture. Unlike media reports, the book contextualizes the Sandusky scandal within the entire history of Penn State's athletic department and within the culture of the university. As a result, Smith relates the scandal to other blemishes in Penn State's past creating a strong historical context. The book houses a meticulous literature review including a detailed 14-page timeline of the Penn State athletic program history. Of note, however, Smith holds a

critical perspective of intercollegiate athletics in general, developed through his previous works (for example, *Pay for Play*). To his credit, his historical presentation in this work, although taking strong stances regarding certain issues, is well-documented and developed with unbiased sources.

In Chapter 1, Smith opens by describing and developing the importance of the idyllic Happy Valley Penn State and State College lifestyle. Smith emphasizes the prominence of football heroes, specifically football coach Joe Paterno, in the cultivation of this larger than life Happy Valley concept. Paterno, “like no one before, put a face to those in the community who liked to believe Happy Valley was different in positive ways from other communities” (p.3). State College residents and Penn State stakeholders viewed the football program and associated athletic success as one of the premier symbols of the excellence, simplicity, and values that set Happy Valley upon the pedestal in which the community intensely believed. The well-cultivated first chapter sets the stage for the historical description of many strategic management decisions implemented to protect and enhance the image of this larger-than-life community symbol that actually lead to the demise of the squeaky clean image Penn State once boasted.

Chapters 2 through 6 guide the reader on a path through the complex contradictory undertones of the Happy Valley concept while also beginning the cultivation of Jerry Sandusky’s role within the football program. Smith details decisions and moves key personnel applied in the pursuit of high profile athletic success that did not represent university priorities. Chapter 2 shows the initial hypocritical role associated with protecting the success of athletics while compromising academic standards early within the football program history. Chapter 3 develops the profile of Sandusky; from his joining the Penn State staff, he was hailed as a man of character. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 detail the role of alumni in protecting the perception of the Penn State athletic program. For example in Chapter 6, prior to Paterno’s commitment to athletics and academics, early football coaches attempted to recruit athletes without promise of athletic scholarship. Behind the scenes, however, influential alumni offered benefits to highly touted prospects. The balance between perception and reality and the hard work to cultivate an image plays a main role in this set of chapters. Smith portrays the atmosphere that protected the Sandusky child molestation scandal as an intentional slow drip of decisions made throughout Penn State’s athletic history that gradually built a pressurized culture of silence compounding when Paterno entered the scene.

In Chapters 7-11, Smith describes the Paterno legacy and his role in establishing Penn State’s exemplary reputation. Chapter 8 once again presents an important contradiction as Paterno spearheaded the move of athletics away from academic control and oversight, what Smith describes as the “athletic coup” that contributed to the program’s demise. Chapter 9 and 10 chronicle Penn State’s conference realignment to the Big Ten as well as what is formally known as “The Grand Experiment” – Paterno’s significant push to position Penn State football as the premier program exhibiting excellence in the pursuit of both academic and athletic success. As Paterno coupled this approach with significant personal philanthropic efforts (described in Chapter 11), Penn State seemed to fully embody the perception of excellence with values. The program held a virtually spotless reputation. Smith describes, however, that during Penn State’s rise, the intensity surrounding the pursuit of athletic success also rose and Penn State failed to inform the public of criminal activity on behalf of some of the players in protection of the football program. The portrayal of Paterno’s legacy is presented in hindsight as the most important and excessive dichotomy of perception versus reality; he embodied the ability to paint a picture of excellence while making critical and contradictory decisions to protect the program.

Chapters 12-16 catch us up to date with a detailed account of the Sandusky child molestation scandal and how the scandal was protected through Penn State's insular culture. Smith advocates that the same culture of silence to protect the image of Penn State in the case of Sandusky was present elsewhere. Consistent with the full historical account, Smith contextualizes the Sandusky scandal within the disgrace associated with women's basketball coach, Renee Portland, who vehemently condemned and persecuted the existence of lesbianism on her team and within her coaching staff. This type of account and full picture context evident throughout the work separates this book from media accounts of the scandal. The book closes with Chapter 15 pinpointing the influential figures that kept the Sandusky secret and Chapter 16 detailing the gravity of NCAA punishment for the athletic program.

In the wake of the Penn State child molestation scandal, in *Wounded Lions*, Smith takes a critical look back and paints a picture of an athletic program that in pursuit of the squeaky clean image throughout its history also created an insular culture of silence that allowed contradictory degradations to persist. Readers encounter interesting facts regarding the history of the athletic program, and the notion that the Sandusky scandal was not the first indication of a wayward path for Penn State. Smith offers both an insider's and nostalgic perspective in this detailed historical account.