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Fear And Loathing In La Liga



Synopsis

It's Messi vs Ronaldo, it's Catalonia vs Castilla. It's the nation against the state, freedom fighters vs Franco's fascists. It's majestic goals and mesmerising skills, red cards and bench brawls. It's the best two teams on the planet going face to face and toe to toe. It's more than a game. It's a war. It's Barcelona vs Real Madrid.... Only, it's not that simple. From the wounds left by the civil war to the teams' recent global domination, historian and expert on Spanish football, Sid Lowe lifts the lid on sport's greatest rivalry. Lowe has spoken to the biggest names and the forgotten heroes who defined their clubs. Men like Alfredo Di Stéfano and Johan Cruyff as well as the only survivor of the most politically charged game in history, the Barcelona striker who knocked Madrid out of the European Cup for the first time ever, and the president who celebrated his club's defining moment by taking a midnight dip in the Thames. By exploring the history, politics, culture, economics, and language, while never forgetting the drama on the pitch, Lowe demonstrates the symbiotic nature of the relationship between these two football giants. In doing so he reveals the human story behind this explosive rivalry.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 14 hours and 11 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Random House Audiobooks

Audible.com Release Date: September 26, 2013

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B00FGBYUAE

Best Sellers Rank: #251 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Sports & Outdoors > Soccer
#532 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Sports & Outdoors > Football #743 in Books > Sports & Outdoors > Soccer

Customer Reviews

This book comprehensively details the history of the rivalry, from 1902 to present day. Of course you cannot understand the rivalry without understanding the Spanish Civil War and this is where Sid Lowe shines with a ton of detail on those dark days. Personally I thought the best part was the chapter on the Alfredo Di Stefano transfer which I found very similar to the story of how the Red Sox

sold Babe Ruth to the Yankees changing both clubs forever. Barca obviously didn't sell Di Stefano but they, like the Red Sox, whiffed on a chance to acquire/keep one of the greatest players of their respective sports. The only flaw of the book I felt was that it felt a little thin when it came to the rivalry present day. It has a detailed overview of Mourinho vs Guardiola but I felt Lowe didn't devote enough pages to Messi vs Ronaldo, ironic considering they are the ones on the cover. Lowe wrote almost nothing on Ronaldo's transfer from Manchester United and little on how Messi ended up at La Masia. But really that's a small nitpick on an otherwise great book. If you want to buy just one book on El Clasico this is the one to buy. Update (10/30/2014): I am changing my rating to 5 from the original 4 stars. When I wrote the review I had read about 50% of it, basically a through scan but now that I've read it more thoroughly I felt I shortchanged Sid Lowe. What he's written here is a deep rich history of the Real Madrid and Barcelona rivalry that is as much a history book as it is a soccer book. As someone who loves history and soccer this is nirvana. This is no doubt the greatest English language book on the Madrid-Barcelona rivalry and I wonder even if there is a Spanish language book that is better. I stand by my original criticism because I think we all like to read about contemporary stuff because that's the part we've personally experienced but when I read about the Spanish Civil War and how Barcelona and Real Madrid fared and the influence of Francoism on the rivalry (and Spanish society overall) I can't but help admire the totality of Sid Lowe's work. He must've done an enormous amount of research. I'm gushing a bit but I cannot praise this book enough. 5 stars for a book that should be winning literary awards.

Sid Lowe's smoothly written and highly entertaining history of these two great football clubs dispels many myths and cuts right to the core of a rivalry that is easily one of the biggest in the history of the game. Whether you count yourself as a Barca fan or a Madridista, a devotee of Messi or Ronaldo, this book will give you a better picture of the historical forces that have shaped two clubs from their formation through the Spanish civil war, their competing philosophies, and some of the titanic personalities who have come and gone. Unless you speak Catalan or Spanish, Sid Lowe's coverage of La Liga for The Guardian is about the best (and certainly the least hysterically biased) football reporting there is, and he certainly doesn't disappoint with this full-length report on the past and current state of the union of the top two clubs in that preeminent footballing nation. No matter what your club preference is (mine happens to be Barca), you owe it to yourself to read this book. There's plenty of great material in here - and that's probably about the only thing both sides would agree on.

The beginning of the book is very interesting as it gets into the time prior to the Spanish Civil War

and the time during the War. The book really explores the impact of politics on the clubs and the impact of the War on the two cities, Madrid and Barcelona (its not what you think). The book got less interesting for me when the book turned to a long and detailed discussion of famous players from both clubs. For a super fan I guess this might be interesting but not for me. I am half way through the book and i am hoping it returns to an exploration of the rivalry.

Over the past year, football journalism/literature has become one of my favorite genres for casual reading. Sid Lowe, an acclaimed journalist who writes for ESPN and the Guardian (among others), weaves social and sporting history with anecdotes about two of world football's greatest clubs. Those who are intimately familiar with Spanish/Catalan history as they apply to both Real Madrid and Barcelona may find some of the material redundant. Thankfully, I was not in that camp and thoroughly enjoyed Mr. Lowe's insights into Spanish culture, society, and language through the lens of its most celebrated football clubs. I would highly recommend this book for anyone who wants to learn more about the history of these two clubs or Spanish history as expressed through football.

One of the best books on Spanish football. It is not only a chronicle of the history of the two giants, it also is a social history of Spain from the 1930s. It covers a lot of ground without sacrificing depth. It explodes a lot of myths surrounding the two clubs that still hold sway. Highly recommended.

Fantastic book. Reading it was like taking a journey in history. Now I understand that Real Madrid vs Barcelona is more than just a football match.

By far the best account of the El Classico rivalry I have ever read, which is saying something since I have read quite a few books on these two clubs. Amazingly detailed account. Author took a lot of painstaking effort and took some real deep dives into the two clubs history. A very honest appraisal of both clubs, their successes, failures, good & bad sides of an eternal rivalry. A great read for any football fan.

If you are familiar with Sid Lowe's work you will enjoy this book. He provides a lot of historical information about Barcelona and Real Madrid. The book is fairly easy to read. The author points out many interesting facts about both teams. A must read for any football mad fan.

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