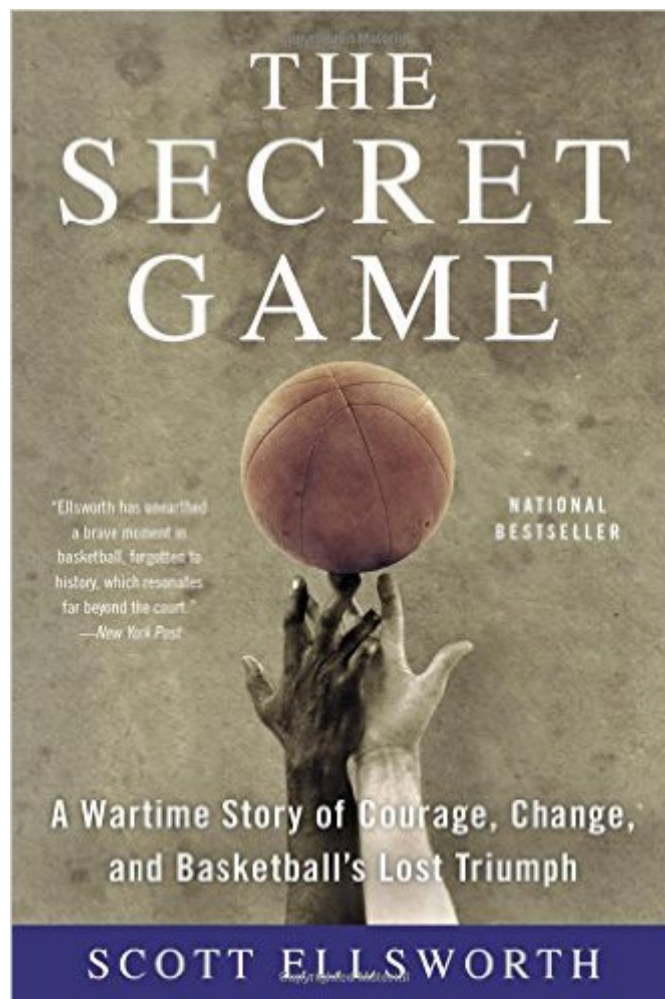


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# The Secret Game: A Wartime Story Of Courage, Change, And Basketball's Lost Triumph



## Synopsis

Winner of the 2016 PEN/ESPN Award for Literary Sports Writing  
The true story of the game that never should have happened--and of a nation on the brink of monumental change  
In the fall of 1943, at the little-known North Carolina College for Negroes, Coach John McLendon was on the verge of changing basketball forever. A protégé of James Naismith, the game's inventor, McLendon taught his team to play the full-court press and run a fast break that no one could catch. His Eagles would become the highest-scoring college team in America--a basketball juggernaut that shattered its opponents by as many as sixty points per game. Yet his players faced danger whenever they traveled backcountry roads. Across town, at Duke University, the best basketball squad on campus wasn't the Blue Devils, but an all-white military team from the Duke medical school. Composed of former college stars from across the country, the team dismantled everyone they faced, including the Duke varsity. They were prepared to take on anyone--until an audacious invitation arrived, one that was years ahead of anything the South had ever seen before. What happened next wasn't on anyone's schedule. Based on years of research, *The Secret Game* is a story of courage and determination, and of an incredible, long-buried moment in the nation's sporting past. The riveting, true account of a remarkable season, it is the story of how a group of forgotten college basketball players, aided by a pair of refugees from Nazi Germany and a group of daring student activists, not only blazed a trail for a new kind of America, but helped create one of the most meaningful moments in basketball history.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Go to page 261. If you read this and are enthralled get the book and spend time getting to know the protagonists. They are several. This book requires some knowledge of basketball and its techniques even though through serendipity one of the catalyst characters knew the inventor of the game; so there is a historical recounting of the game up to 1944. The book's major flaw is its anvil of the words used to describe American blacks: Negro or Colored. The author chooses to use these two terms throughout when describing era. Because racial description will continue to evolve, presently at African American, the author's choice while disturbing is appropriate. He presents violent and subtle acts of racism as equally powerful and segregating. He does not spare the reader, choosing not to gloss over anything. It is amazing that in our era these same things still happen. To get to the climatic point of the eventful non-event it is necessary to show how simply difficult it was to have a game between differing races in the North Carolina of the 1940s. It is not hard to imagine in other small towns throughout the South and other places in America similar gatherings of integration were occurring. This particular game was pivotal because of its link to the birth of basketball. The end of the book is more of a pause and somewhat anti-climatic. The NOTES section is as important reading as the rest of the book. Even if you are not a fan of basketball or sports, and this is about a time when sports were not the central focus of America, this is a great capsule of the struggle for American unity and integration. It describes a time when segregation and subjugation of blacks was acceptable to most blacks and whites. It details how a small college prospered amid the horrific second class citizenship of the area. There are glimpses of the rise of black middle class America not through sports but business. This book gives understanding that being the same is not equal. Loosely related incidences are brought forward to paint this tableau in time with a sharp razor edge; there are parts that feel like walking on knives. After reading this, one wonders why have things changed but the results remain: unarmed black men shot and their killers acquitted. The book does offer insight, but of course no answers. Integration was a slow arduous process, even in the North although the book makes this seem different, but it was only a first step.

Scott Ellsworth has written a story that is fascinating on so many different levels. As an African-American alumnus of Duke University who grew up in North Carolina I was already aware of the events of "The Secret Game" before reading the book. Yet, Ellsworth provides a page-turning story describing the backgrounds of the participants of the game and how they ended up participating in the game. His background of life in the South during the 1940s makes it crystal clear why the game was such a triumph in an era where black and white Southerners lived in 2 different worlds and rarely mixed on any type of equal footing. As an added bonus despite being an avid

student of the game of basketball and its history, I also learned new details about how basketball became the popular college sport that it is today. It is very evident from the beginning that this is a well-researched book and Ellsworth takes the "facts" and transforms them into an engaging story of courage, societal and personal change, and the role a basketball game played in it all. Every American should read this book. My grandmother hammered home the fact that "If you don't know your history, then you are doomed to repeat it." Even though we live in a time that is fifty years after the Civil Rights Movement many people do not understand the history of race relations in this country on a psychological level and thus are surprised at racial events that happen with alarming regularity in our country today. Scott Ellsworth provides insight into this history and perhaps sends each of us the message that we all must make courageous choices and not accept the status quo if we are to ever achieve racial harmony and a true "color-blind" society. Scott Ellsworth has written a riveting tale about basketball and how a game played in the wartime South helped to break down racial barriers and signaled the coming of a new era for both the sport and the country in general.

Was thinking "Boys in the Boat" was a once-a-decade book, but then picked this up on strength of its just winning the PEN-ESPY award for literary sportswriting. Easy to see why it won--a remarkable, almost-forgotten story (also from the 30's/'40's), told with the highest level of craftsmanship, and a true page-turner! An eye-opener on how horrible and difficult Jim Crow was; like "Boys...", similar in the tale of humble people transcending obstacles, pulling together and achieving miracles for the time. What's more, the author engagingly traces evolution of the game of basketball itself, and paints wonderful tableaux of the game's founder and developers. Am hoping PR on this amazing book will spread and it will achieve "Boys..." readership level.

Excellent story, well written. The author deftly weaves the many tendrils of this complex tale into a complete tapestry. Thus the book has a relatively slow start to it, but stay tuned, the story picks up speed and momentum as the time of the secret game approaches, and the reader is well rewarded for his patience. The city of Durham, its institutions, and the entire country serve as the backdrop for this uniquely American story. The author has done a masterful job of telling the story of a largely unknown event, and this will be appreciated by sports fans in general, and basketball fans in particular. I loved the book.

I liked The Secret Game by Scott Ellsworth. I learned about the history of: basketball, basketball teams in white and black colleges. This is a very interesting book. It is a good mix of the sport of

basketball and the coaches & players of the highlighted colleges. It is an interesting book if you like sports history, basketball and/or black history. I would recommend this book.

A fascinating story of the South, basketball, & the black & white players who defied Jim Crow for the love of the game.

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