



Soldiers First: Duty, Honor, Country, and Football at West Point

Joe Drape

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Bestselling author Joe Drape reveals the unique pressures and expectations that make a year of Army football so much more than just a tally of wins and losses.

The football team at the U.S. Military Academy is not like other college football teams. At other schools, athletes are catered to and coddled at every turn. At West Point, they carry the same arduous load as their fellow cadets, shouldering an Ivy League-caliber education and year-round military training. After graduation they are not going to the NFL but to danger zones halfway around the world. These young men are not just football players, they are soldiers first.

New York Times sportswriter Joe Drape takes us inside the world of Army football, as the Black Knights and their third-year coach, Rich Ellerson, seek to turn around a program that had recently fallen on hard times, with the goal to beat Navy and "sing last" at the Army-Navy game in December. The 2011 season would prove a true test of the players' mettle and perseverance.

Drawing on his extensive and unfettered access to the players and the coaching staff, Drape introduces us to this special group of young men and their achievements on and off the field. Anchoring the narrative and the team are five key players: quarterback Trent Steelman, the most gifted athlete; linebacker Steve Erzinger, who once questioned his place at West Point but has become a true leader; Andrew Rodriguez, the son of a general and the top scholar-athlete; Max Jenkins, the backup quarterback and the second-in-command of the Corps of Cadets; and Larry Dixon, a talented first-year running back. Together with Coach Ellerson, his staff, and West Point's officers and instructors, they and their teammates embrace the demands made on them and learn crucial lessons that will resonate throughout their lives—and ours.

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