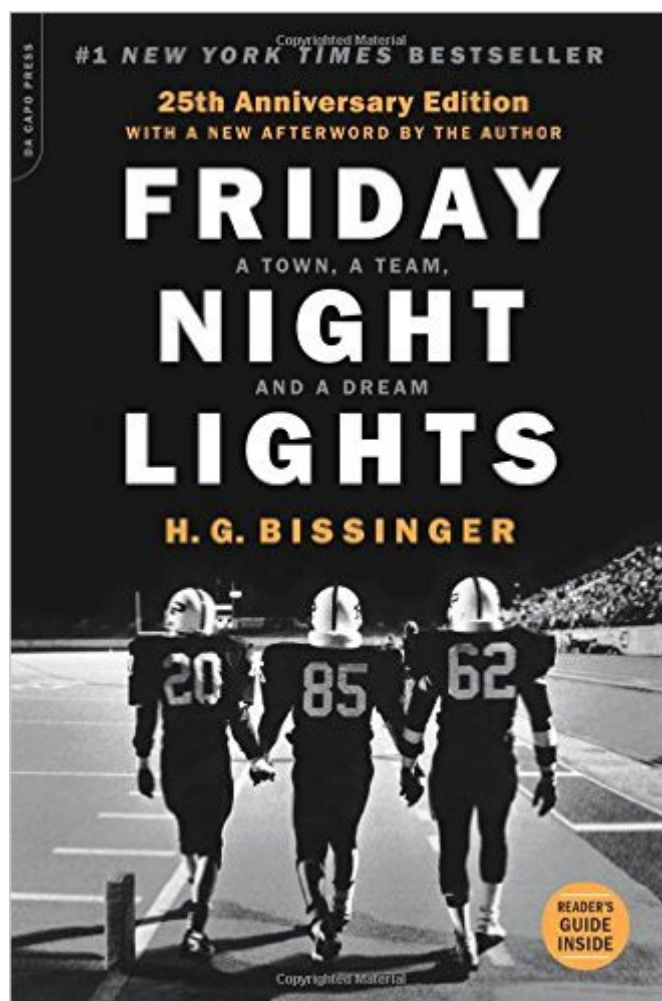


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Friday Night Lights, 25th Anniversary Edition: A Town, A Team, And A Dream



Synopsis

The 25th anniversary edition of the #1 New York Times bestseller and Sports IllustratedTM's best football book of all time, with a new afterword by the author. Return once again to the timeless account of the Permian Panthers of Odessa; the winningest high-school football team in Texas history. Socially and racially divided, Odessa isn't known to be a place big on dreams, but every Friday night from September to December, when the Panthers play football, dreams can come true. With frankness and compassion, H. G. Bissinger unforgettably captures a season in the life of Odessa and shows how single-minded devotion to the team shapes the community and inspires—and sometimes shatters—the teenagers who wear the Panthers' uniforms.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I finally got around to reading this book just recently; I wish I had read it when it came out in 1990. "Buzz" Bissinger pulls no punches in telling it like it is, how a high school football team can be the main rallying point of an otherwise isolated community, several hundred miles from the nearest large metropolitan area; a community whose residents are deeply religious, God-fearing, and shamelessly prejudiced and intolerant of non-whites. I remember the controversy this book caused shortly after its release. Having read it, I now understand why: In a community where there's otherwise "nothing to do," a local high school football team can unite people of all races, incomes, cultures, etc. I should know: I used to live in Lubbock, not too far from Odessa; the townfolks share the same conservative beliefs and euphoric passion for football. Bissinger's metaphor-rich style of writing really made me feel as if I was back in West Texas. The similarity of the two cities was

uncanny. I began to read in search of something startling and controversial; instead it brought back a lot of memories. As I learned, the people of Odessa and Lubbock are strikingly similar (except Lubbock also has collegiate football, from Texas Tech University, to root for, as well as a few local high schools). I found Bissinger's descriptions totally accurate, if not downright eerie. In the end, I couldn't help but feel for the 17- and 18-year-olds who had to endure the pressure to produce one victory after another, and the supporters' shameless win-or-else attitude. Bissinger's ability to empathize with America's appetite and obsession for winning really drove home the point. When I finished reading it, I cried. This book was THAT soul-stirring. To Stephanie, a Permian High School grad who wrote a review of this book in May 1998: I'd advise you to read "Turning The Page - '88 Permian team still can't escape glare of 'Friday Night Lights,'" by Dave Caldwell (The Dallas Morning News, November 24, 1999). You called Bissinger "a liar," but Jerrod McDougal, whose loud Bon Jovi music was mentioned in the introduction, said "The Book [as it's known in Odessa] painted a pretty ugly portrait of the town, but there's not a lie in it." And Randy Ham, a Permian grad who works at a bookstore in Odessa, mentioned, "It is a bitingly accurate portrayal of the town. It really is." Mike Wallace, the "60 Minutes" correspondent, said that "'Friday Night Lights' reads like fiction; unhappily, it is fact." I feel that's all one needs to know to prepare for this truly incredible read.

In 1970, having won district and bi-district championships, my high school football team played the Odessa Permian Panthers for the regional crown -- and they creamed us. Most frightening was the crowd that came to Abilene from Odessa to watch the game. They wore solid black (Panther colors) and they were FANATICS. When the Panther band spelled "MOJO" on the field (I'd never encountered that term before) they went absolutely NUTS. I finally understood the program a little better after reading Friday Night Lights, a terrific examination of the semi-pathological football infatuation in Odessa. And I can't believe the author would ever return there, if he valued his life, because he certainly did not paint a flattering picture. This book is WELL worth reading. Everyone who ever went to high school will glean something valuable from it. Most touching and telling, I thought, was the scene at the end of the book, after the season had ended, wherein the coach took down the slips of paper showing the names of the seniors who were on the team that year, and unceremoniously dumped them into the trash can. That metaphorically demonstrated the entire town's ethos toward its high school football heroes. After they no longer played for the team, they were just plain trash like everyone else.

When I first picked up this book, on my lunch break, I arbitrarily flipped to a page in the middle and

started reading. I became so engrossed in it that I was late getting back to work from my lunch break. Such is the superb quality of writing that Bissinger brings to this book. Friday Night Lights is about the Permian High School Panthers football team in the 1988 season. In Odessa, TX, they only "have two things - football and oil, and there ain't no more oil." Carried on the adolescent shoulders of the black-clad Panthers are the hopes, dreams, aspirations, and societal well-being of an entire community. The book focuses on the intense scrutiny and pressure placed on the players, coaches, and even families associated with the program. After a tough loss, the head coach can expect to have his house vandalized, his family verbally assaulted, and calls made for his firing. The student population of Permian is predominantly white, but the few black players imported from Odessa's poor, mostly black, south side are some of the team's most successful players. The book highlights the contrast in the white, wealthy suburban area Permian is located in against the older section of Odessa, populated mostly by blacks and Hispanics. The book also profiles several of the team's star players. Some live for every single moment they can wear the Panthers uniform, while others are conflicted at having to play in such a pressure-cooker environment. Some are the lucky sons of Odessa's richest residents, bound for Ivy-League schools, while others come from painful poverty and broken homes. Odessa is portrayed as an entire city of broken dreams, devastated by the downturn in the oil industry where unemployment is high and crime higher. What holds the community together is the Friday Night Lights at Ratliff Stadium, where the Panthers do battle not only for team and school pride, but for the pride of an entire community and people. I cannot recommend this book more highly.

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