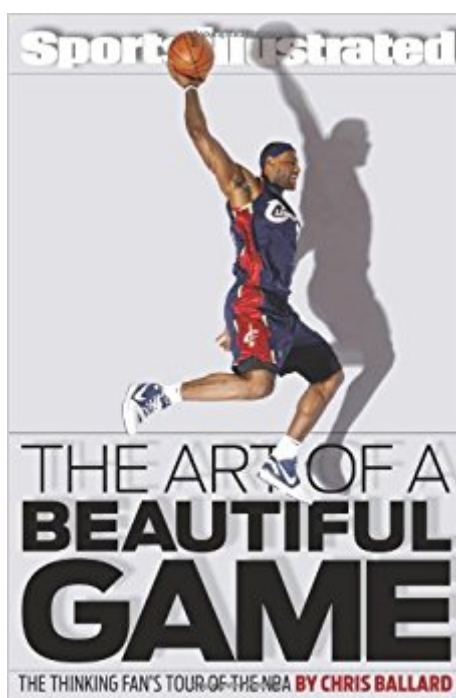


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The Art Of A Beautiful Game: The Thinking Fan's Tour Of The NBA (Sports Illustrated)



Synopsis

In *The Art of a Beautiful Game*, Chris Ballard, the award-winning *Sports Illustrated* writer who has covered the NBA for the past decade, goes behind the scenes to examine basketball in ways that will surprise even die-hard fans. An inveterate hoops junkie who played some college ball, Ballard sits down with the NBA's most passionate, cerebral players to find out their tricks of the trade and to learn what drives them, taking readers away from the usual sports talk radio fodder and deep into the heart of the game. Ballard talks to Dwight Howard, a prolific shot-blocker, about the enervating feeling of meeting another man at the height of his leap; challenges Steve Kerr to a game of H-O-R-S-E to understand the mentality of a pure shooter; reveals the roots of Kobe Bryant's unmatched killer instinct; and spends time with LeBron James to better understand both his mental game and his seemingly unlimited physical skills. He tracks down renowned dunkers from Dominique to Shaq to explore the impact of the dunk on the modern game, shadows Shane Battier during his preparations to defend LeBron, takes lessons from a freethrow shooting guru who once hit 2,750 in a row, and attends an elite NBA training camp to feel the pain that turns a prospect into a pro. Packed with lively characters and basketball history, and grounded in superb writing and the reportage that is the hallmark of *Sports Illustrated*, *The Art of a Beautiful Game* is an often witty, always insightful look at the men like Steve Nash, Yao Ming, and Alonzo Mourning who devote themselves to this elegant and complicated sport. It ultimately provides basketball fans what they all want: an inside read on the game they love.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review The conventional wisdom among casual NBA fans holds that the game is an improvisational, formless shoot-a-thon played by undisciplined athletes whose abilities are the product of genetics rather than practice. To which Sports Illustrated reporter Ballard replies, "Ha!" He explores such topics as killer instinct in a chapter on Los Angeles Lakers star Kobe Bryant in which it's revealed that his legendary competitiveness can be traced back to a summer league where, as a 12 year-old matched against NBAers and collegiates, he didn't score a single point. Never again. He also explores the big man's world by examining the games of Shaquille O'Neal, Yao Ming, and Hall-of-Famer David Robinson. There are chapters revolving around pure shooters (Ray Allen), point guards (Steve Nash), and rebounders (Ben Wallace). In his examination of the free throw, he profiles Tom Amberly, a retired podiatrist who, in 1993 at 71, made 2,750 consecutive free throws over 10 hours in front of 10 paid witnesses. Amberly's feat and the Steve Nash profile are worth the price of the book. Ballard's previous foray into book-length basketball journalism was Hoops Nation, a 1999 Booklist Top 10 sports book. The titular thinking fans will find their admiration confirmed; casual fans will see the light and find themselves converted. Hallelujah! --Wes Lukowsky

" Chris Ballard has written a ten-drum honor song to the intricate blue-collar poetry of NBA basketball. You should always be inspired by an amazing assist, three-pointer, dunk, free throw, or blocked shot, but after reading this book, you should be even more inspired by the years of hard work it took any player to get to that moment. I love this book." -- SHERMAN ALEXIE, NATIONAL BOOK AWARD WINNER" The game has needed a smart, witty, cool-eyed deconstruction for decades. Now it's here." -- S. L. PRICE, AUTHOR OF HEART OF THE GAME" The perfect storm -- great athletes collide with great writing. Sets the literary standard for getting inside the head and heart of greatness." -- LARRY COLTON, AUTHOR OF COUNTING COUP" Some chroniclers specialize in breaking down the technical finer points, while others are poets and soul-searchers, explorers of the inner game. Only a precious few do both well, and Chris is at the top of that list, as he shows in The Art of a Beautiful Game." -- JACK McCALLUM, WINNER OF THE CURT GOWDY MEDIA AWARD FROM THE NAISMITH BASKETBALL HALL OF FAME" Much has been written about the strategies of great basketball coaches. Chris Ballard tells us about the strategies of great basketball players. After reading Ballard's book, you will watch an NBA game differently -- with a new kind of understanding." -- BILL BRADLEY, FORMER U.S. SENATOR" People love to claim that

pro athletes never have anything interesting to say, but that's because they're usually asked stupid, nonessential questions. Yet ask any talented man about the details of his craft and he will inevitably tell you everything you need to know, including who that man truly is. And that's what Chris Ballard has done. This is a basketball book for people who actually care about basketball." -- CHUCK KLOSTERMAN, AUTHOR OF EATING THE DINOSAUR

I chose Ballard's book over Bill Simmons' better-selling tome to serve a specific purpose: introduce my wife - who has developed an obsessive rooting interest in our local five (the 17-time champion Celtics) - to some of the finer points of the NBA game. That, it turns out well for us, is a perfect use for Ballard's work. I don't say this to imply that it was beneath me (I am no basketball maven myself), or that it was great "for the little lady," but mean it as a recommendation of the book as a very smart, very accessible look at the finer points of the mechanical and strategic points of the game. Ballard uses access to specific well-known NBA stars to explain the mechanics of things like the jump shot (Steve Kerr) and the box out (Dwight Howard), and he is able to fit in some anecdotes that never really feel too cutesy. Between Ballard's book and the DVR rewind feature, my wife is now appreciating the games even more thoroughly, picking out pick and rolls but also beginning to really stretch her legs by doing things like watching action off the ball. That is the way to enjoy the NBA. Ballard's book will help you do it.

I never played a day of organized basketball, despite my 6-6 height and a wingspan reminiscent of Tayshaun Prince. Only in recent years, now that my vertical measures the same as a crippled hippo, have I started playing rec ball on anything approaching a regular basis. I just never connected with the game in a way that many of my friends have. I never liked the style-over-substance impression I always got from watching NBA ball. Playing more regularly helps me appreciate the sport in a way I never did in the past. This book actually got me appreciating the NBA game in a way I never did in the past. I had to read a lot of reviews about this book before deciding to buy a copy. I have zero interest in reading yet another image-controlled, David Stern-approved look at NBA stardom. (If you're on the fence, like I was, go online and Google this book. Read the reviews from the people who live and breathe the game.) Like those guys, I didn't want the same random crap about a player's life off the court. Hell, I'm just starting to find myself enjoying the game on a new level; I want to know why the greatest players in the world love it as much as they do. What motivates them? How do they approach the game? What is the substance behind all that NBA-approved sheen? This book, more than any other I've read, peels away all the

crap and carves right down to what makes Kobe so lethal, LeBron so powerful and Battier so maddening to opponents. I think Ballard is the kind of guy who loves the monster dunk, yet knows when it's just another two points and when it truly swings momentum. There's a difference there that never shows up on those ridiculous ESPN highlights. That's the substance of the game, the stuff I'm starting to really connect with now that I'm playing. And that's the stuff that Ballard brings out so well in this book.

I'm a huge baseball fan and, among other things, I love reading books showing the artistic/beautiful side of the game. I'd never read a book expressing the artistic/beautiful side of basketball, until now. The author goes in depth to analyze facets of the game and NBA players who excel in those areas--rebounding, free throws, blocked shots--showing both the art and science of basketball. Even for a non-fan of the NBA, such as me, this is an interesting look at the game.

The book is an NBA-centric look into what makes the greatest players what they are - their passion, ruthlessness, innate capabilities and, always overlooked, their hard work. The author deconstructs these elements of hardwood success by focusing on recent and current NBA players, from Steve Kerr and Steve Nash, to Kobe Bryant and LeBron James. Entertaining, insightful and detailed - a joy to read.

Basically this book takes individual skills per chapter (mindset, shooting, passing, defense, rebounding, etc.), breaks them down by analyzing players that excel in each skill (Nash for passing, Dwight Howard for rebounding, Battier for defense) and explains how each of them has perfected their particular skill through interviews, analysis, and actual experience. My favorite part of the book was the chapter on Kobe Bryant's competitiveness and killer instinct. I am not a Kobe fan but after reading this, it gives me better understanding on why he is the way he is. Overall, I would recommend this book. It's easy to read and it makes you appreciate the game better.

I think Chris Ballard has used this book to write from a very unique perspective. The author as fan. What I love about the book is that he doesn't just dig into questions he assumes the fan-at-large might want to know. He asks questions he as a hoop fan would want to know. And I think that makes him more connected to the reader. I found tips on bettering my game, stats that'll sell my hoop talk with friends, and a sympathetic soul -- someone who loves the game as much as I do.

A nice quick read with stories that are beyond typical media. Any NBA fan would pick up a thing or two new things from this book.

Ballard does an excellent job exploring behind-the-scenes of the NBA by talking to people who are the best at certain skills. His access to so many different sources is incredible yet he manages to keep the book entertaining.

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