



Power Plays: Politics, Football, and Other Blood Sports

By John M. Barry

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Power Plays: Politics, Football, and Other Blood Sports By John M. Barry

The pursuit and wielding of power may be America's most intoxicating and sometimes revolting pastime. John M. Barry, award-winning author of *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How It Changed America* (1997), purveys American uses and abuses of might in the media, in Washington, in Olympians, and in college football.

With *Power Plays: Politics, Football, and Other Blood Sports* Barry draws together essays that examine the causes and effects of power. He shows how much politics and powerful agendas affect our lives. Barry draws from personal experience to probe deep into all aspects of gaining and expending personal clout.

Reflecting on life as a major college football coach, on politicians such as Dick Cheney, Newt Gingrich, and Jim Wright, or on such American athletes as world record-holding hurdler Renaldo Nehemiah, Barry pushes past the glamour and glitz to tackle the nitty-gritty, down-and-dirty stratagems that create and destroy America's most powerful figures.

Barry's witty and well-informed narrative voice keeps the discussion from becoming purely abstract. His numerous examples, including candid moments from his own life, focus on people and specific events that remain--and should remain--in the public eye and imagination.

Revealing the ethos, skills, and brinksmanship inherent in both sports and politics, Barry draws parallels between the two, often presenting sports as a metaphor for understanding the American political scene. His poignant memoirs of coaching football, and his highly opinionated voice within the other essays, make Barry as much a character and example in the book as any of the people he profiles.

Drawing on his 1989 book on the rise of Newt Gingrich and the fall of Jim Wright, *The Ambition and the Power: A True Story of Washington*, Barry re-envisions a book-length argument as a series of profiles and shorter articles. Barry creates in *Power Plays: Politics, Football, and Other Blood Sports* an

engrossing and disturbing primer on American politics, helping readers to understand how might is made, manipulated, and lost.

John M. Barry lives in New Orleans and Washington, D.C., and is the author of the award-winning *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How It Changed America* (1997) and *The Ambition and the Power: A True Story of Washington* (1989). Former Washington editor of *Dun's Review*, he has published articles in *Sports Illustrated*, *Newsweek*, the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, the *Washington Post*, *Esquire*, and the *Los Angeles Times*.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

In a somewhat different take on politics, Barry (*The Ambition and the Power*) interweaves the rise and fall of two powerful House leaders with true stories from the sports world. The contrast allows Barry, a former college football coach, journalist, and editor, to illustrate the similarities and differences between these two arenas, where "powerful" people compete and where winning and losing have tangible consequences. The narrative revolves around the rise of Jim Wright, Democrat from Texas, to the speakership of the House and the efforts of Newt Gingrich, Republican from Georgia, to destroy him politically and ultimately replace him as speaker only to be himself removed in ignominy a few years later. Barry argues that these events mark the transition of U.S. politics from an era of civil competition to one of inhospitable competition in which personal attacks replace intelligent discourse, with the mass media being both manipulator and manipulated in the struggle. While one can find instances of unusually harsh incivility in American politics in many earlier periods, this well-written book makes good points and is worthy of a wide audience. Its lessons, though not original, are ennobling. Thomas J. Baldino, Wilkes Univ., Wilkes-Barre, PA
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From [Booklist](#)

In this thoughtful collection of essays, ex-football coach John Barry, author of the acclaimed *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927* (1997), examines the use of and drive for power, as it is expressed in politics and in sports. Drawing from his earlier book, *The Ambition and the Power*, about the rise and fall of former Speaker of the House Jim Wright, Barry finds many of the same issues resurfacing in the lives of college football coaches as he did in the battle between Wright and Newt Gingrich. Although the interweaving of the sports essays and the political material occasionally seems a bit forced--as if the author was looking for a way to recycle the Wright-Gingrich material--Barry is a perceptive critic, and his musings on sport as metaphor are mostly quite provocative. This will be of more interest to political junkies than to sports fans. Scott Wilkens
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Review

"Barry provides valuable insights into the sources and methods of power." -- Bill Kovach, Chair Committee of Concerned Journalists

"If you want to really understand the heart and mind of a professional or Olympic-caliber athlete, read this book." -- Ron Swoboda, outfielder for the New York Yankees and the World Champion

"John Barry sees common things in a uncommon way. This book provokes." -- Former Senator Bob Kerrey, President New School University and winner of the Congressional Medal of Honor Bill Kovach, Chair Committee of Concerned Journalists

"Power Plays, like his previous books on Congress and the great flood of 1927, is a must-read." -- Norman Ornstein, resident scholar American Enterprise Institute

"The essays crafted by this coach turned author burn with his illuminating fire." -- David Maraniss author of *When Pride Still Mattered: A Life of Vince Lombardi* and *First in His Class: The Biography of Bill Clinton*

Users Review

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Royce Axtell:

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