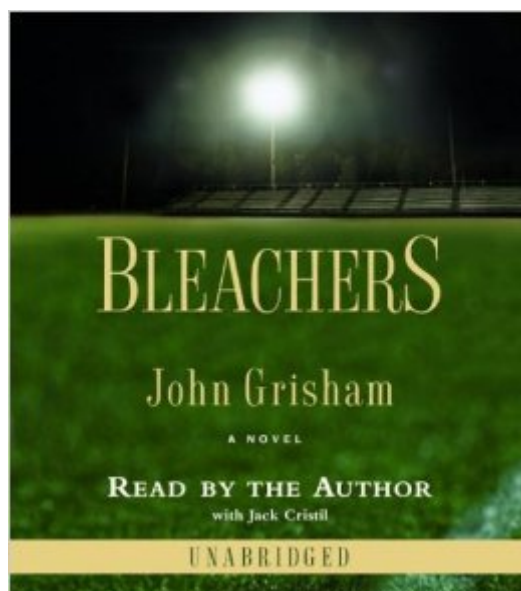


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# Bleachers



## Synopsis

High school all-American Neely Crenshaw was probably the best quarterback ever to play for the legendary Messina Spartans. Fifteen years have gone by since those glory days, and Neely has come home to Messina to bury Coach Eddie Rake, the man who molded the Spartans into an unbeatable football dynasty. Now, as Coach Rake's boys sit in the bleachers waiting for the dimming field lights to signal his passing, they replay the old games, relive the old glories, and try to decide once and for all whether they love Eddie Rake or hate him. For Neely Crenshaw, a man who must finally forgive his coach and himself before he can get on with his life, the stakes are especially high.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

You've read *Bleachers*, John Grisham's newest bestseller, many times in a thousand other books, many of them better than this somewhat undersized novel. The general atmosphere of high school football which consumes an entire town has been told better in *Friday Night Lights*. The harsh treatment of young football hopefuls by dictator-coaches was brought into cruel focus in the non-fiction *Junction Boys*, about Bear Bryant and a legendary sweatbox training camp for his players during his first summer at Texas A&M. And, of course, keeping vigil for an impending death has been literally done to death many times, notably in Edward Albee's Pulitzer-Prize winning play *All Over*. So, why read *Bleachers*? Because, once again, the fresh, newspaper-like quality of John Grisham's minimalist prose draws us into the story and makes us love and, in our own ways, relate to all the characters, saint and sinner alike. Here, we have Neely Crenshaw, the gifted

ex-quarterback who can't forgive Coach Eddie Rake for one moment of lockerroom abuse; Cameron, the ex-girlfriend whom he jilted in high school and who cannot fully forgive him; Mal, the ex-player turned lawman who has his own chilling tale to tell; and finally, the ex-teammates who meet spontaneously in the bleachers of the old stadium awaiting news of the coach's impending death. They meet shyly, hesitantly at first, then start to drink and tell stories while listening to a tape broadcast of their most famous game. (Their shared stories as they relive this game are the undisputed high point of the book.) Yes, we even have the memorial service in which our ex-quarterback and (believe it or not) our dearly departed coach get the chance to have a final say. We know the outcome of this story as surely as Friday night football in the South. Why retell it?

This slim (168 pages) novel follows a week in the vigil and funeral for an historic high school football coach in a small town devoted religiously to the sport. Actually, fanatics, crazed, zealots, insane boosters and other, even stronger words come to mind to describe the town's commitment. The pending death of the coach gives reason for a goodly number of his 700-plus former athletes to come into town. Neely - the knee-damaged super quarterback of the stunning 1987 state championship -- is back, for the first time in a long time. He, not the dying coach, is the center of the story. Supporting Neely is a good array of colorful characters, high school jock stereotypes - the gangly, misfooted punter who later comes out of the closet and now owns a book store, the star receiver now managing the local bank, the convict, the ex-convict, and the current sheriff, the scrawny back who suffers a terrible fate, and more. And there is the memory of the perfect, dumb, devilish, blonde cheerleader, who is out of town but on the mind of more players than just Neely. She took Neely away from another stereotype: the cute girl who grows up to be perfect. Neely can't forget her and she can't forgive him for leaving her for the legs and lungs of the vixen. There is not much time to develop the characters, not in these few pages. Two threads run through the book: the death that led to the coach's firing and the mystery behind that 1987 state championship when, trailing 31-0 at the half, Neely and Silo (Yes, he's built like a silo; there's also one athlete named Hindu.) lead the team back for a miraculous win. Best of all, one alum drags out a tape of the second half, allowing a radio broadcast to magnify the mystery: Why did the coaches not return to the field for the second half.

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