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Gold In The Water: The True Story Of Ordinary Men And Their Extraordinary Dream Of Olympic Glory



Synopsis

"Oh my God, is this really happening?!" It was halfway through the 200-meter breaststroke finals at the 1998 World Championships and the rookie was gliding four feet beneath the water's wind-rumpled surface. Above him, 15,000 spectators were screaming encouragement and millions more were watching on live international television. All of them could see what the rookie and the seven other finalists could not: the actual race as it unfolded. Underwater, the swimmer stole a peek down the length of the pool. That quick glance may have very well changed the course of a career, for from then on, nothing would ever be the same for this athlete. A bucket of adrenaline dumped into his gut and flooded his arms and legs. He wanted to laugh and shout in joyful surprise. Is there any greater joy than feeling unbridled power course through the body at the exact instant it is most needed? The swimmer burst to the surface and began his first stroke with a ferocious arm sweep..." So begins *Gold in the Water*, the highly acclaimed and mesmerizing tale about the remarkable two-year journey an elite team of swimmers takes to the 2000 Olympic Games. Decades ago, northern California's aged Santa Clara Swim Club, the birthplace of modern swimming, was home to nearly every U.S. Olympic swimmer. Now, after years of irrelevance, a distinctly American renewal is taking place there. In the water, race a young prodigy and an older mentor, two best friends who have emerged as the world's two best breast stroke swimmers. As they wrestle with their increasingly complex rivalry, around them swim some of the world's most talented athletes. There is a long-retired starlet who has returned to her sport for unexplained reasons and is engineering one of the most remarkable comebacks in sports history. There is an enigmatic butterflyer systematically removing emotion from his Olympic journey while engineering a plan to join his famous father in Olympus. With them is a troubled back stroker, a man with preternatural talent who despises his sport even as he is proclaimed a future Olympic hero. Overseeing their journey is one of the most explosive and passionate coaches in American sports. At turns both brilliant and unbearable, swimming's bete noire knows the 2000 Olympics represent a final chance to restore a tarnished reputation and banish long-buried demons. The spellbinding narrative follows the sport's biggest stars as well as its unheralded darkhorses on their incredible march to the Olympics. Seamlessly weaving together escalating rivalries, unexpected setbacks, profound sorrows and incredible joys, the book captures like none before it the true passion and grit that the pursuing greatness requires. Meet the biggest stars of the 2000 Olympics, as well as the ordinary heroes chasing an elusive dream. Their shared story will permanently change how we see the Olympic athlete. Boldly sweeping in its literary power and pace, *Gold in the Water* has been called "a cross between the *New Yorker* and *Chariots of Fire*." With exquisite precision, first-time author P.H.

Mullen creates a fascinating world of suspense and emotion, where the human desire for excellence rules over all and where there are no second chances for glory. Above all, *Gold in the Water* is about the triumph of the human spirit.

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Customer Reviews

At long last, an up close and personal look at USA elite swimmers. Mr. Mullen tells an engrossing tale of the odyssey of four young men striving for berths on the Olympic team, Australia 2000. Most Americans are unaware of the depth, strength and long tradition of the USA's predominance in Olympic swimming. US teams are so strong that unfortunately, we have to leave at home as many deserving finalists as those who go. Only two representatives of each individual swimming event are allowed for each country. (It used to be three, but the powers that be were tired of the US taking gold, silver and bronze in every event.) The lead actors are All-American Tom Wilkens, multi-faceted Kurt Grote and everyone's dream or nightmare of a coach, Dick Jochums. Supporting roles showcase super controlled Dod Wales, son of an acclaimed Olympic swimmer, and burn out Tate Blahnik who has it all, but is tired to death of competitive swimming. The author follows these magical four for eighteen months culminating in the 2000 Olympics. The front cover calls these four "ordinary men." I strongly disagree; they are unique and extraordinary athletes. Tom Wilkens, in particular, grabbed my attention, affection, and awe. This book is a page-turner; I read it in one sitting. It is not just for swimming aficionados, but also for anyone who likes to read about what it takes to become a champion and the inevitable burdens on the strength and psyche of the contenders. A glossary of terms would have been helpful, but the author is masterful in his

explanations. As a parent of a former age group swimmer, I can attest that this is no puff piece; Mr. Mullen tells it like it is.

This book is a compelling and engrossing character study of a group of super-achieving athletes with congruent but sometimes competing aspirations. It has an excellent narrative drive that made it a real page-turner, and perhaps because it pulls no punches in its treatment of its focal characters, the reader is left with a deep appreciation for the complex and usually (but not always) admirable qualities of elite athletes. Swimmers tend to be smart, and this is an intelligent treatment of both swimming and competition in general: this book is to the standard sports expose as collegiate swimmers' GPAs are to the GPAs of (pick your contact sport) players. Although I read this on the recommendation of a friend who is a serious swimmer, I feel it deserves an audience far beyond the competitive swimming world, for which I'm sure it will be required reading.

I am not a swimmer, so I was amazed to find myself hooked by *Gold in the Water* from the first lines on Page One. This incredible book has everything you will ever want in a sports tale--drama, rivalry, flawed character, human emotion, and high stakes. The characters themselves were so real you feel like you're their teammates. I've never read a book that comes remotely close to chronicling so much intimate, personal details about world-class athletes. Surprise (not): Deep down, they're like everyone else. I can't remember the last time a book could make my adrenaline race AND make me cry (more than once). The final pages were full of surprises. That made the unexpected ending all the more triumphant. *Gold in the Water* sets the standard for describing the pure beauty of athletes chasing an impossible dream with all their hearts.

Mullen is magnificent! He took me where no other writer has even previously done. He made it personal and made it as emotional as all hell! Congrats. As an avid fan of physical sports and rarely a fan of soft individual type sports, such as swimming, tennis, and dancing I was entranced with the dedication and the courage of these immortal athletes. Time and time again Mullen sent CHILLS down my back!! Have you ever found your self throwing fake punches while watching Boxing on ESPN or while watching the Rocky movies ? Throughout the 300 some odd pages I was throwing jabs and crosses into my pillow because of the extreme adrenaline rush of Kurt's and Tom's swims, and throwing upper-cuts towards the accusations of Dara's enhanced swims. *Gold in the Water* is GOLDEN and it often left me looking at the ceiling and questioning whether I had ever really pushed myself to greatness...or if I ever could. Keep them coming PH!!

I was attracted to this book because my son is a competitive swimmer. He's not a voracious reader, but he zipped through *Gold in the Water* in a few days. Then he started passing it around his swim team. Last month, I read it. Mullen brings together a combination of understanding of the sport, empathy for athletes and coaches and a journalist's attention to truth and detail in putting together this book. The story of these athletes preparing for a year and a half for the two minute-event that will decide whether or not they make the Olympic team has all the emotion, conflict and suspense of a great novel. This is the best sports book I have read since *Boys of Summer*.

"Seabiscuit" is not about a horse. It is about the people around the horse and their competitive desires, ambitions, and very interesting lives. In exactly the same way, "Gold in the Water" is not just about the sport of swimming. It is about a handful of compelling people living the Olympic Dream and trying to learn the elusive secrets of being great. Quite simply, I could not put this book down the first time I read it. After a second reading, I believe this is the best true-life sports drama I've ever read. The message is as strong as Lance Armstrong's "It's not about the Bike", and the writing is far better. Personally, I think businesses could benefit from the motivation messages. Young people would do well to emulate the strong character of the book's subjects, particularly two swimmers who don't even make the Olympics, Kurt Grote and Dod Wales. I thought the coach, Dick Jochums, is too hard and stubborn in places. But he got me to start working out again, so he can't be all bad. This is definitely a book to put on your list.

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