

Who was the best movie coach in the history of filmdom?

For a football fan, the nomination might be Pat O'Brien, who beat John Wayne and William Holden for the starring role in "Knut Rockne All American" and inspired a good performance out of Ronald Reagan in the bargain. For a hockey buff, the prize might well go to Paul Newman in "Slap Shot," coach and captain of the unfortunate Chiefs, who unleashes the Hanson Brothers on an unsuspecting world. For a baseball devotee, surely the best is Trey Wilson of "Bull Durham," who has to remind his charges that they have pretty simple obligations: "You throw the ball, you catch the ball, you hit the ball."

And then, loosening definitions, there's always Jeff Bridges of "The Big Lebowski," along with "Kingpin," the mightiest of bowling films.

Former Hollywood Reporter contributor Randy Williams takes a generously broad view of what constitutes a sport, which allows him to admit "Rollerball" to the pantheon, and he has a keen eye for story qualities and production values alike.

All of this makes his opinionated but fact- and trivia-jammed compendium of the top 100 sports films a list that couch potatoes and weekend warriors alike can reliably use to pick and choose from the hundreds and thousands more that sports of all kinds have inspired.

The wacky Olympics spoof "Million Dollar Legs," starring W.C. Fields, earns the cleanup position in Williams' lineup. "Certainly a little thin on plot, it really hangs by a thread," Williams allows, but then so do most slapstick films; in all events, it's more entertaining than Leni Riefenstahl's swastika-haunted "Olympia," which comes in sixth. At the top of his countdown list is "The Hustler," that noir classic of 1961, which brought the world of the pool hustler to light and asks the fundamental question, "What does it mean to be a winner and a loser?"

In between, Williams ranks films that touch on sports and games of all kinds. Rugby sees its champion in "This Sporting Life" (No. 3), skateboarding in "Dogtown and Z-Boys" (No. 94), martial arts in "Enter the Dragon" (No. 72), skiing in "Downhill Racer" (No. 30), bicycling in "Breaking Away" (No. 8), surfing in "The Endless Summer" (No. 62).

The big sports are well represented with multiple films apiece, baseball above all, for few baseball films have been outright stinkers. Football has the weepy "Brian's Song" (No. 14) and the caustic "North Dallas Forty" (No. 12), among others, while auto racing, golf, basketball, boxing, horse racing, running and even soccer earn several entries.

"Sports Cinema" rewards second-guessing and playing stump-the-author, for it prizes competition, after all. Where is "Ben-Hur" and its champion chariotteering? Where is Jeffrey Lebowsky? Why "Rollerball"? But it's a tough game. Williams is hard to beat; if it's played with a ball or a bat, or involves a track or arena, or can be bet on, then the odds are that he's seen the film and considered it.

There's no science here, and not even much method. This is simply the ultimate sports fan's assessment of the films he likes best, and broad as it is, there's plenty of room for argument and for substituting players. Those who share Williams' love of the game and the screen will find his book a great pleasure.

Gregory McNamee is *The Hollywood Reporter's* literary critic. He can be reached at [thr.books@mac.com](mailto:thr.books@mac.com).



book

BY  
GREGORY  
MCNAMEE

#### details

By Randy Williams  
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#### the bottom line

For jocks and  
jock-flick fans alike,  
an opinionated,  
richly illustrated and  
altogether  
entertaining  
compendium of the  
best sports films.

## SPORTS CINEMA



## 100 MOVIES

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**RANDY WILLIAMS**