



The Captain Class: The Driving Force Behind the World's Greatest Teams

Sam Walker

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The former global sports editor of *The Wall Street Journal* profiles the greatest teams in history and identifies the counterintuitive leadership qualities of the unconventional men and women who drove them to succeed.

The secret to winning is not what you think it is.

It's not the coach. It's not the star.

It's not chemistry. It's not a strategy.

It's something else entirely.

Several years ago, Sam Walker set out to answer one of the most hotly debated questions in sports: What are the greatest teams of all time? He devised a formula, then applied it to thousands of teams from leagues all over the world, from the NFL to the English Premier League to Olympic field hockey. When he was done, he had a list of the sixteen most dominant teams ever, period. At that point, he became obsessed with another, more complicated question: What did these freak teams have in *common*?

As Walker dug more deeply, a pattern emerged: Each team had the same type of captain—a singular leader who drove it to sustained, historic periods of greatness.

Fueled by a lifetime of sports spectating, twenty years of reporting, and a decade of painstaking research, *The Captain Class* tells the surprising story of what makes teams exceptional. Drawing on original interviews with athletes from two dozen countries, as well as general managers, coaches, executives, and others skilled at building teams, Walker identifies the seven core qualities of this Captain Class—from doggedness and the knack for nonverbal communication to aggression and the courage to speak truth to power.

Told through riveting accounts of some of the most pressure-soaked moments in sports history—from Bill Russell's legendary "Coleman Play" in the 1957 NBA Finals to Barcelona's "Figo Game" against Real Madrid in 2000—*The Captain Class* doesn't just bring these events to life; it presents a fresh, counterintuitive take on leadership that can be applied to a wide spectrum of competitive disciplines.

The sixteen leaders who make up the Captain Class were never the most skilled, nor were they paragons of sportsmanship. They were often role players, allergic to the spotlight, and famously inarticulate. In short, they will challenge your assumptions of what inspired leadership looks like.

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