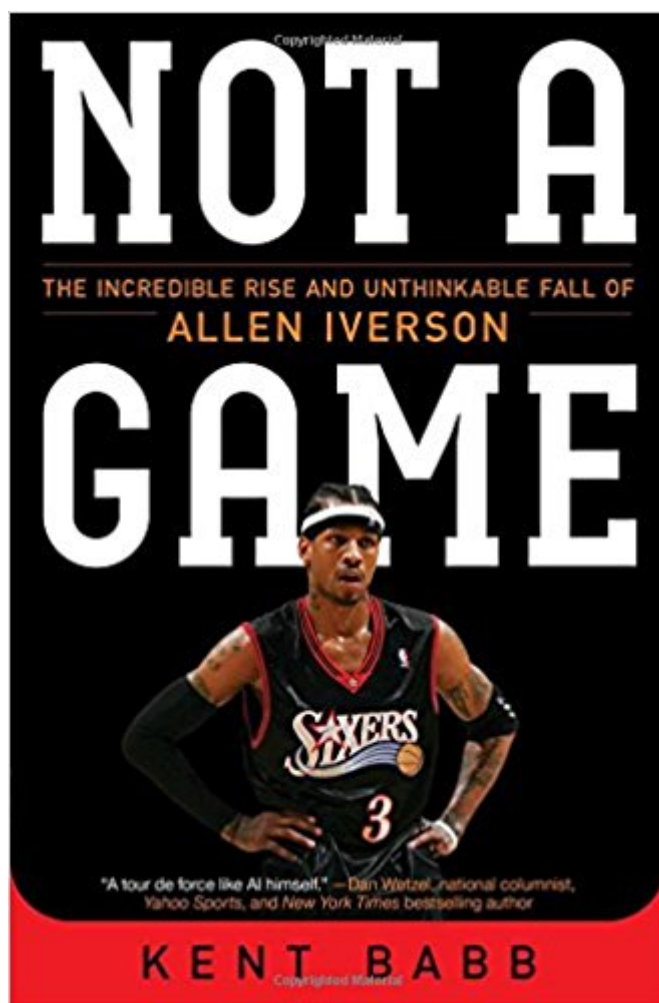


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# Not A Game: The Incredible Rise And Unthinkable Fall Of Allen Iverson



## Synopsis

Former NBA superstar Allen Iverson was once one of America's most famous athletes: a trendsetter who transcended race, celebrity, and pop culture, and emerged from a troubled past to become one of the most successful and highly compensated athletes in the world. Now, his life and career come vividly to light in this "searingly honest and intimate portrait of a captivating icon" (Baxter Holmes, ESPN NBA reporter). Through extensive research and interviews with those closest to Iverson, acclaimed Washington Post sportswriter Kent Babb gets behind the familiar, sanitized, and heroic version of Iverson—the hard-changing, hard-partying athlete who played every game as if it were his last. Babb brings to life a private, loyal, and often generous Allen Iverson who rarely made the headlines, revealing the back story behind some of Iverson's most memorable moments, such as his infamous "Practice" rant, delving even deeper to discover where Iverson's demons lurked. He drank too much, stayed out too late, spent more money than most people could spend in a dozen lifetimes—blowing more than \$150 million of his NBA earnings alone. His then wife Tawanna, seen often as the mild-mannered woman who tamed the bad boy, tried to keep her husband and family on the rails. But, as so many others learned on basketball courts, she was no match for the force of nature that was Iverson. Jealousy, meanness, and relentless eventually wore down even his biggest fans, teammates, and, eventually, even his most formidable opponent. Not a Game is an impeccably researched, honest look at the factors that led to the rise and fall of a basketball superstar. In doing so, it illuminates the dark side of our modern day, multi-billion dollar sports and entertainment culture in which talented players are disposable—and all too often success and tragedy wear the same number.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A searingly honest and intimate portrait of a captivating icon, but also a cautionary tale for any young star. Kent Babb captures the complexity of Allen Iverson from all angles in a fascinating must-read for all sports fans." (Baxter Holmes, ESPN NBA reporter) "Allen Iverson was impossible to ignore, a one man hurricane, on the court and off; equal parts dynamic and depressing. With *Not a Game* Kent Babb brilliantly tells his story and it's a tour de force like Al himself." (Dan Wetzel, National Columnist, Yahoo Sports and New York Times bestselling author) "Babb's thorough storytelling empathetically ebbs and flows between Iverson's trials and triumphs, connecting the dots while taking the reader on an emotional truth-seeking ride of nostalgia, hope, and exasperation . . . . *Not a Game* is engrossing and definitely to be read and discussed." (Shana Renee Stephenson, founder and editor-in-chief, AllSportsEverything.com) "Allen Iverson is a life unfathomable to most. With *Not a Game*, Kent Babb questions the enigma that is The Answer, taking readers into a world most don't know and, quite frankly, most don't want to know exists in America." (John Valenti, Pulitzer Prize-nominated journalist and author of *Sweetie*, the story of New York City basketball legend Lloyd Daniels) "For better or worse, Allen Iverson has the uncompromising "my way" persona. Kent Babb eloquently, and at times poignantly, captures Iverson's swagger—raw and flawed, regal yet real." (Benjamin Hochman, sports columnist, The Denver Post) "This is more than just great sports writing, this is writing at its best. Babb strips away the public persona of iconic superstar Allen Iverson to tell a stunning story of triumph, tribulation and ultimate tragedy. It's a must-read about a complex hero who had it all for too short a time." (R.G. Belsky, author of *The Kennedy Connection* and *The Midnight Hour*) "Babb delves deep into Iverson's inscrutable soul. This is a sad but fascinating read." (Publishers Weekly) "It pricks the skin and provokes a response." (The Washington Post)

Kent Babb is a Sports Enterprise Writer at The Washington Post, which he joined in October 2012. His work was included in the 2013 edition of *ESPY*, and his long-form journalism has been honored eight times by the Associated Press Sports Editors, including first place in feature writing in 2005 and 2010.

When this book came out in early June, it received lots of press in the Philadelphia media for the chapter discussing Allen Iverson's famous practice rant. In a larger sense, though, Kent Babb's searing biography of Iverson paints an ugly picture of the player as a mean drunk with a severe alcohol problem. Iverson burned through \$150 million in his career and still drinks Coronas to excess nearly every day of his life at T.G.I. Fridays and P.F. Changs because that is "exotic" beer to him. The book felt like a combination of Mickey Mantle meets Mike Tyson. Like Mantle, Iverson was a Hall of Fame player in his sport, yet he remains an undependable alcoholic whose greatness could have been even more amazing. Like Tyson, Iverson burned through a staggering amount of wealth while being bled dry by moochers and hangers on. The book does include somewhat shocking stories of a destitute Iverson calling up ex teammates and asking to borrow money by 2011 and violent fights with his wife, Tawanna, that included chasing her around Philadelphia with a gun and vowing to either "...die or I'm going to jail. And I guarantee you I'm not going to die." But it is the "We talkin' 'bout practice" rant that is seemingly the most fascinating part of the book. I am a huge fan of playing low-level poker, and Atlantic City was where I first heard that the genesis for the practice rant was that Iverson was an alcoholic who would keep vampire hours and frequently drink to excess in A.C. until 8-9 a.m., then be unable to make practice a few hours later. The Babb book confirms that Iverson was drunk during the rant. It blows my mind that a guy could miss 70 practices in one year. The excuses became so laughable that Sixers coach Larry Brown kept a running tally in his office for how many times each member of Iverson's family was sick or how often Iverson would have car troubles and be unable to attend practice. At the end, Brown got to the point where he was indifferent to whether or not Iverson came to practice because he was such a colossal pain in the \*\*\* when he would show up at practice too hung over to do anything or still drunk from the night before. Babb's book talks about 76ers general manager Billy King standing off-camera a few feet from Iverson during the practice rant and contemplating whether or not he should just walk in front of the cameras and end the press conference. Former 76ers team President Pat Croce, who was instrumental in the team drafting Iverson, was watching the press conference at home and turned the channel once he realized Iverson was drunk and ranting. Croce sandbagged Brown into taking the 76er job by telling the coach that Iverson was an "angel" and that the two of them would get along splendidly. Throughout the book, Babb wrestles with whether or not Iverson is a bad guy who occasionally does some good things or a good guy who just never grew up or was forced to take responsibility for his actions. In addition to many stories about Iverson coming home so drunk that he would frequently urinate on the floor (if he came home at all) and being so apathetic to his five children that he did not even know where they went to school, the book contains stories of

incredible acts of kindness from Iverson such as kicking back his daily per diem to Sixers equipment personnel and the lifelong bond he has formed with the Georgetown medical trainer, Lorrie Michel. Babb went through a litany of events that Iverson no showed, even going so far as to sit at a bar and get drunk rather than attend his own basketball camp that charged middle school campers \$225 a head to supposedly meet Iverson. In the end, though, Babb offers at least a fleeting hope that Iverson can salvage the rest of his life. Larry Brown left Philadelphia because he had grown tired of dealing with Iverson, but the coach continues to reach out to the star player, just to see how he is doing and if the awful stories he has heard recently are really true. It was Brown who used his connections with 76ers management to get the team to bring Iverson back for a swan song in 2010. Ultimately, though, Iverson screwed up his last chance in the NBA by remaining unreliable. In the book's epilogue, Babb continues to wrestle with his feelings about Iverson, an irresponsible alcoholic prone to acts of incredible kindness. "The point was not that he was [either good or bad,] a friend or a headache," wrote Babb. "A caring family man or an overgrown child without regard for responsibility, an astonishing success or a man who lost it all. He was both." Personally, I never had illusions that Iverson was a saint. But he certainly comes across as less likable than he was before I read Babb's book.

This is well written if slightly overlong--but the subject is what makes this one of the better sports bio's I've read in a long time. Allen Iverson is infuriating, but at the same time--even after reading of all of the awful things he has done to loved ones, coaches, teammates and (let's face it) nearly everyone he came into contact with during his career and after, I truly wish the best for him and hope he turns his life around and turns himself into someone he can live with. I was never a fan, but absolutely loved watching this kid play and develop. I saw him as extremely overrated by the Eastern Press bias and also saw him as a bit of a loser because he hardly ever made his team better, but tore it up from the inside by his erratic and crazy behavior and lifestyle. And yet---as so many who came into contact with him seemed to think--there was a certain spark to this guy and you constantly found yourself thinking that there was a good guy underneath the bs. He shows glimpses of it once in awhile (as every jerk tends to do) but you find yourself wishing he could rid himself of the hangers on and the Hampton that always seemed to drag him back in a downward direction. In Babb's telling, you will find almost unfathomable accounts of a spoiled rotten athlete, but so much of this has to be tempered with his background, a mother who was almost as selfish as the son he raised and good people who simply would not set limits or draw the line until they had squeezed every bit of benefit they themselves could derive. I truly hope that people have learned

something from the tragedy that is Allen Iverson--and I hope that Allen uses the remainder of his time on earth to turn his life around for his own sake, the sake of his children and of those who sincerely tried to help him.

I am from Philadelphia and saw Allen play his whole career. I always wondered why he would snub his nose at the coaches and fans who supported him. This book answers a lot of these questions about "the answer" and his odd behavior. As a medical professional I would diagnose Iverson as alcohol dependent and he may also be bipolar, ADHD or both. This guy needs treatment and medication. The good news is under the pathology this athlete is a loving, loyal and caring person. This is why the story is so typical of so many who suffer from these conditions. It makes you sad to read it. On the flip side athletically, pound for pound he was the best basketball player ever, fearless. As a fan and a Philadelphia person this is how I will remember his legacy. I just hope he gets and accepts the help he needs so he can live the rest of his life in peace.

“Not a Game,” by Kent Babb, was a resourceful, respectful knothole of insight into the cultural paradigm influence known as “A.I.” The author was respectful and articulate, with a reverence for communication and craft while balancing hard truths. Emotional interplay was engaging, but at times marginally flat. The flashback tooling used was disconcerting to storyline flow, but one quickly came to grips with the unique sequencing. A good read, finished in three sittings., but not one that screams, “pick me up!”

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