



# Sportswriter: The Life and Times of Grantland Rice

*Charles Fountain*

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"Grantland Rice was the greatest man I have known," Red Smith once wrote. "The greatest talent, the greatest gentleman." Most of Rice's contemporaries would have shared this assessment. One of the most celebrated sportswriters of all time, it was Grantland Rice who immortalized Notre Dame's outstanding 1924 backfield as "The Four Horsemen," who nicknamed Red Grange "The Galloping Ghost," and who authored one of the most frequently quoted poetic couplets in all of sport: "For when the One Great Scorer comes to mark against your name, / He writes--not that you won or lost--but how you played the Game." But more important, if we see the 1920s and 1930s--the era of Jack Dempsey and Babe Ruth and Bobby Jones--as a Golden Age of Sport, it is in large part because Grant Rice saw them as golden, and conveyed this golden vision to millions of readers daily.

In *Sportswriter*, Charles Fountain provides the first full-length biography of Grantland Rice. This colorful, vividly narrated portrait ranges from Rice's childhood in Nashville, to his days as star athlete at Vanderbilt, to his first jobs in Atlanta, Nashville, and New York, to his prime as the most popular, most read sportswriter of his day, the dean of a remarkable group of 1920s writers that included Heywood Broun, Damon Runyon, Paul Gallico, and Ring Lardner. Fountain provides unforgettable portraits of Rice's extraordinarily wide range of friends, from cartoonist Rube Goldberg and columnist Franklin P. Adams, to sports legends Babe Ruth, Jack Dempsey, and Bobby Jones, to his closest friend, Ring Lardner, a man who was in many ways his opposite. We learn of Rice's staggering accomplishments as sportswriter, which included writing a column that appeared six days a week in over a hundred newspapers, selecting an All-America Football Team that was *the* All-America team for more than 20 years, editing *The American Golfer*, the leading golf magazine for over a decade, producing and narrating numerous film shorts, and in general publishing some 67 million words over a 53 year career. And as Fountain tells this story, he also provides memorable snapshots of American life: the small-town baseball teams at the turn of the century, the bustling newspaper world of New York City (at a time when there were 14 daily papers in New York, twelve on and around Park Row), and most of all, some of the great sporting events of all time, including the Dempsey-Willard heavyweight bout, the 1919 Black Sox World Series scandal, Bobby Jones's Grand Slam, and much more.

Here then is the colorful life and times of a man who loved sports--who loved the contests, loved the atmosphere, loved the camaraderie of the press box and of a passenger-train drawing room--and who loved sharing it all with the millions who read his work.

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