
The Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) was created in 1953 by eight schools as an answer to several years of scandals concerning grade fixing, recruiting violations, and less than exemplary academic standards that had plagued college sports up until that time. Comprised of the universities of Maryland, Wake Forest, Duke, North Carolina, North Carolina State, Clemson and South Carolina, the ACC went on to create a strong legacy in college basketball.

*ACC Basketball: The Story of Rivalries, Traditions, and Scandals of the First Two Decades of the Atlantic Coast Conference* by J. Samuel Walker covers the years 1953-1972. These years coincide with major changes not only in athletics, but in society as well. Walker gives us the stories behind some of the game’s most interesting coaches and players, but he also weaves a narrative of a conference struggling with two important challenges: balancing academic integrity with the role of college athletics and, in the 1960s, integrating their basketball teams. He covers all this while also giving attention to the many rivalries that have grown through the years between the early conference members.

One of the biggest issues the league faced was the integration of African American student athletes. Unfortunately, the conference was very slow in this effort. December 1, 1965 marked the day the first African American, Billy Jones from the University of Maryland, played basketball for an ACC school. This was not the latest date for an African American to suit up in any athletic conference (other conferences were slower), however it was several years beyond integration efforts that had occurred in other collegiate sports and well beyond the integration of most major sports.

While scandals were not eradicated completely through the creation of a new conference, the ACC’s first twenty years included an attempt to create a new, higher standard in college athletics. Walker gives us great insight into one of the ACC’s most controversial academic rules: the 800 rule, requiring student athletes to score at least an 800 on the SAT. This rule ultimately resulted in the departure of the University of South Carolina in the early 1970s as a protest against the conference’s enforcement of the 800 rule after the NCAA has established a lower standard that was used by other conferences.

J. Samuel Walker, who previously wrote *Prompt and Utter Destruction: Truman and the Use of Atomic Bombs against Japan* and *The Road to Yucca Mountain: The Development of Radioactive Waste Policy in the United States*, applies his skills as a historian towards a topic that is very near to his heart. Walker became a fan of ACC basketball as a graduate student in 1969 at the University of Maryland, and he also followed the University of Virginia when his brother Wally enrolled there on a basketball scholarship in 1972.

There have been several books written about the ACC, but many devote much of their prose to the intense rivalry of two of college basketball’s most successful schools: the University of North
Carolina at Chapel Hill and its close neighbor, Duke University. Left in the shadows are several schools with equally intense rivalries and entertaining stories to tell. Walker, however, uses his forum to give us a complete picture of the entire conference, taking us through each school’s successes and failures. Here’s hoping he continues his research and shares more stories of the ACC.

There is a very thorough bibliography and index, and this book should delight fans of the ACC and college basketball in general. It is recommended for all libraries.

Calvin Craig
Gaston College