

BARTON

LIBRARY

Dare to Know

Sports Fiction

Fiction in which playing a sport or the love of a sport has a significant impact on the protagonist or plot.

A genre in which the theme of sports and athletics is the central focus. Sports became a fixture in American popular literature in 1896, beginning in inexpensive pulp magazines before moving to “slick” magazines and novels. Protagonists are typically professional or amateur athletes who face struggles on and off the field or court in connection with their sport. They may also be young people first discovering their natural athletic talents and navigating new opportunities. Team sports is often emphasized, and the story of the underdog, be they a misfit team and a single, scrappy player, is a timeless theme. Dreams and goals are another common trope, and achieving those is the central point of the novel, although not necessarily the most important one. Athletic seasons offer an opportunity for prolonged story and character development arcs. The outcome of the final game is often critical to the story’s conclusion: if the underdogs lose, they have still learned valuable life lessons; if they triumph, they have achieved something great. Sports novels are character-driven, action-oriented, and fast-paced. These stories are normally set in the real world, either the present or the recent past. As they can depict moments of drama, intensity, and sometimes comedy, sports fiction may blend with **coming-of-age fiction** and **humorous fiction**. Burt L. Standish’s *Frank Merriwell at Yale* (1897), Ring Lardner’s *You Know Me Al* (1916), John Roberts Tunis’s *The Kid from Tompkinsville* (1940), Budd Schulberg’s *The Harder They Fall* (1947), Mark Harris’s *Bang the Drum Slowly* (1956), Bernard Malamud’s *The Natural* (1952), W. C. Heinz’s *The Professional* (1958), Leonard Gardner’s *Fat City* (1959), Walter Tevis’s *The Hustler* (1959), David Storey’s *This Sporting Life* (1960), and Robert Dailey’s *Only a Game* (1967) are classic examples.

Common Elements

Passion for a sport	The ultimate test	Boxing
Character growth	The big game	Hockey
Commitment	The unlikely ringer	Tennis
Competition	The mentor figure	Golf
Team work	Baseball	Track and field
Sportsmanship	Football	Horse racing
Hustling	Basketball	Auto racing

Benefits of Reading

Shows readers a world where talent, hard work, and dedication triumph over skin color, class, and religious differences

Offers to readers inspirational stories of overcoming challenges

Provides readers with sports metaphors that relate to real life
Allows readers to experience the joys and disappointments of sports and life

Teaches readers the importance of teamwork, problem solving, and grace under pressure

Modern Literary Examples

<i>The Art of Fielding</i> (2011) by Chad Harbach
<i>Barracuda</i> (2013) by Christos Tsiolkas
<i>Beartown</i> (2017) by Frederick Backman
<i>Bleachers</i> (2003) by John Grisham
<i>Bliss, Remembered</i> (2010) by Frank Deford
<i>A Brave Man Seven Storeys Tall</i> (2014) by Will Chancellor
<i>The Crossover</i> (2015) by Kwame Alexander
<i>The Damned UTD</i> (2006) by David Peace
<i>End Zone</i> (1972) by Don DeLillo
<i>Everybody's All-American</i> (1981) by Frank Deford
<i>Game Changer</i> (2018) by Tommy Greenwald
<i>Ghost</i> (2016) by Jason Reynolds
<i>Gold</i> (2012) by Chris Cleave
<i>Golf in the Kingdom</i> (1971) by Michael Murphy
<i>The Hopeful</i> (2015) by Tracy O'Neill
<i>Infinite Jest</i> (1996) by David Foster Wallace
<i>Lord of Misrule</i> (2010) by Jimmy Gordon

<i>The Mighty Walzer</i> (1999) by Howard Jacobson
<i>Million Dollar Throw</i> (2009) by Mike Lupica
<i>Netherland</i> (2008) by Joseph O'Neill
<i>North Dallas Forty</i> (1973) by Peter Gent
<i>Now is the Time for Running</i> (2011) by Michael Williams
<i>Once a Runner</i> (1978) by John L. Parker Jr.
<i>A River Runs Through It</i> (1976) by Norman McLean
<i>Semi-Tough</i> (1972) by Dan Jenkins
<i>Shoeless Joe</i> (1982) by W. P. Kinsella
<i>Shutout</i> (2010) by Brendan Halpin
<i>The Singles Game</i> (2016) by Lauren Weisberger
<i>Slam!</i> (1996) by Walter Dean Myers
<i>The Sport of Kings</i> (2016) by C. E. Morgan
<i>Stephen Florida</i> (2017) by Gabe Habash
<i>Tapping the Source</i> (1984) by Kem Nunn
<i>The Throwback Special</i> (2016) by Chris Bachelder