

Madkour: Kevin White personifies ‘A Good Sport’

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Kevin White has spent the past two years writing on his iPhone about his four-decade journey in sports business. Much of the writing was done at airports and on planes, as the 74-year-old Irish kid from New York pieced the threads of his life together. In “A Good Sport: Reflections on A Full Life in College Sports,” White blends the personal and professional — from growing up in New York to becoming one of the top leaders in college sports. There are consistent themes over the 196-page book, to be released Jan. 17, which had the working title “From Glen to Glen”; his Irish ancestry, Catholicism and family. He also chronicles the inner workings of leadership in college athletics and offers a vision for the future, a system in which three of his children — Mike, Danny and Brian — work daily. It’s hard not to admire the wild journey he and Jane, his wife of 53 years, have shared, and the book is filled with reflections, anecdotes and lessons.

GROWING UP: His mother, Rita, went to New York City at 15 and was “pure magic on stage,” known for her signature tune, “Danny Boy.” ... White, on his father: “My father taught me to be enormously resilient, to mask my insecurities and vulnerabilities to outsiders and to simply find my way.” ... “As a schoolboy, I was constantly ill-prepared.”

LEARNINGS: At Saint Joseph’s College in Indiana, he took “Philosophy of Coaching,” where he researched football coach **Frank Kush** and college administrator **Dave Hart Sr.**, the vaunted family in college sports that White remains close to today. ... Getting married to Jane in 1972, moving to Florida to be closer to his parents, where he got a coaching and teaching position, making \$6,750. ... His love of “parking garage jogging,” clean, flat and well lit. ... Working with the legendary **Roy Kramer**, who was the football coach at Central Michigan, while **Tyrone Willingham**, whom he would hire at **Notre Dame**, was the defensive backs coach. ... Starting his career as an athletic director at Loras College, a small Catholic school in Iowa, in 1982. ... Launching the National Catholic Basketball Tournament at Loras in 1983, and working with sports executive **Charlie Besser** to get it on TV. ... Becoming AD at the University of Maine in 1987: “We fell in love with the pristine environment and peerless landscape.” ... Convincing author **Stephen King** to buy a suite at Maine. ... Going to Tulane in 1991, where he outlined his “three and five” philosophy — the three biggest challenges and five best opportunities for the

program. ... His work with legends **Mike Slive** and **Chuck Neinas** in the early days of Conference USA. ... Arriving at **Arizona State University** in 1996, after never living “anywhere out west” ... Serving on the Pac-10 TV committee, leading to a 30-year friendship with ESPN’s **George Bodenheimer**.

LESSONS IN SOUTH BEND: While White was “seriously infatuated” with ASU, **Gene Corrigan** called him about the opening at Notre Dame: “I was being called home to the Irish Catholic motherland!” ... White’s reflection on his time at Notre Dame from 2000 to 2008 is honest and brilliant: “I did not manage the competing political systems effectively. ... It is within a sort of dark, sober space that I tend to revisit my Notre Dame tenure.” He admits he didn’t read people or situations effectively, and it taught him how “lethal an informal (alternate) power base can be if left unchecked.” ... Football coach **George O’Leary** being let go after résumé discrepancies was one of the “toughest decisions I ever faced.” There was also the brief tenure of Willingham: “I needed to get more of the politically influential people to buy into Tyrone’s appointment on the front end,” and he was “never fully accepted.” ... White writes with pride of his staff that included more than 30 colleagues who have become athletic directors, conference commissioners or college leaders. ... In May 2008, Corrigan, aware of White’s frustrations in South Bend, reached out again about the AD role at Duke.

OTHER TAKEAWAYS: He and the NCAA’s **Danny Gavitt**, calling **Mark Emmert** to say they were shutting down the NCAA men’s basketball tournament in March 2020, and going to O’Lunney’s in Times Square for a Guinness or two. ... “In my career as an AD, I proudly — by design — never hired a male to coach a female sport.” ... He shares his vision for a “dramatically decentralized” NCAA, which must “engage in supreme storytelling, not unlike the Walt Disney variety. In addition, the NCAA will need to be the negotiator of all broadcast property initiatives.” He also believes the “enterprise needs an infusion of practitioners at the top.”

Kevin White calls himself a better coach than administrator and admits he can’t explain why his life turned out as special as it has. He is a teacher, a truth-teller and will use his voice. He found his way from a challenging childhood, dreamed big and worked his ass off to realize that dream. That’s the story of “A Good Sport.”