



Masters of Modern Soccer: How the World's Best Play the Twenty-First-Century Game

Grant Wahl

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In *Masters of Modern Soccer*, *Sports Illustrated* writer Grant Wahl asks: How do some of the game's smartest figures master the craft of soccer? By profiling players in every key position (American phenomenon Christian Pulisic, Mexican superstar Javier "Chicharito" Hernández, Belgium's Vincent Kompany, Spain's Xabi Alonso, Germany's Manuel Neuer) and management (Belgium coach Roberto Martínez and Borussia Dortmund sporting director Michael Zorc), Wahl reveals how elite players and coaches strategize on and off the field and execute in high pressure game situations.

Masters of Modern Soccer is the definitive thinking fan's guide to modern soccer. For a supporter of any team, from the U.S. national teams to Manchester United, or any competition, from Mexico's Liga MX to the World Cup, this book reveals what players and managers are thinking before, during, and after games and delivers a true behind-the-scenes perspective on the inner workings of the sport's brightest minds.

America's premier soccer journalist, Grant Wahl, follows world-class players from across the globe examining how they do their jobs. This access imbues *Masters of Modern Soccer* with deep insight from the players on how goalkeepers, defenders, midfielders, and forwards function individually and as a unit to excel and win. Wahl also shadows a manager and director of soccer as they juggle the challenges of coaching, preparation, and the short- and long-term strategies of how to identify and acquire talent and deploy it on the field.

A book that will stand the test of time, *Masters of Modern Soccer* is the most in-depth analysis of the craft of soccer ever written for the American fan. For any fan, player, coach, or sideline enthusiast, this book will change the way they watch the game.

Masters of Modern Soccer: How the World's Best Play the Twenty-First-Century Game Details

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Mahlon says

I was previously familiar with Grant Wahl, although I must admit his writing had never really stood out to me before. My main exposure to him came through Fox's nightly World Cup highlight show World Cup tonight. In addition to offering interesting insights, I found he had an engaging personality and interacted well with the other cast members of the show. I decided that this book would make a great World Cup companion read.

I was really struck by the fact that the subjects he chooses are at the top of their game this very minute, and not 2 to 4 years ago which is often the case with books of this type. In most cases it seems like Wahl repeatedly interviewed his subjects over the course of a year or two which really added depth that you don't normally see in a book this short. Another revolutionary technique he uses is to watch game film with his subject and just asked him what he sees. I have never seen this approach used in a soccer book before and it really enhanced my understanding of the game, or at least how the world's elite players think about the game.

I won't go into every interview here, but I think the interviews with Christian Pulisic, Roberto Martinez and Juan Carlos Osorio will be of particular interest to American fans. Also noteworthy is an interview with Dortmund's Director of Football, the first interview with any Director of football that I know about in book form.

This Book is perfect for both new fans of the game and experienced fans who really want to take their knowledge to the next level. My only criticism of this book is it's way too short but that's also what makes it such an unexpected surprise. I think people Will be referring back to this book for years to come.

Geoff says

The value in this book lies in the player and manager interviews and the insights they bring to fans that haven't played at the professional level (the focus on predetermined patterns in both set pieces and especially open play was unexpected and fascinating).

Wahl's writing and narrative flow were strangely clunky, since I generally like his sportswriting. I wonder if the editing of the book suffered to get it out in time for the world cup?

Juan Carlos Osorio and Roberto Martinez come off especially well (as does Dortmund); given how Mexico and Belgium have played so far, this looks especially prescient.

Kim Foulds says

I'm a soccer fan so learning more about the technical aspects was interesting though sometimes a bit over my head. Calling it masters of modern soccer and including Pulisic but not a single woman player is hugely disappointing. Pulisic may one day be a great but over the slew of current women greats is a major oversight.

I would have loved a chapter on Carli Lloyd, Marta, or any of the other greats on the women's side.

Jill says

It's 2018, the year of the World Cup, and soccer has changed from the game it was originally. It's faster and more physical, more technical and more commercialized. But its fans are just as passionate as ever, and increasingly savvy thanks to the internet, the amount of data now available on every game in every league, and easy access to games from around the world. Personally, as I sat preparing to write this, we watched FC Koln succumb to Bayern Munich 1-3 in the Bundesliga.

There is no better time than now to prepare for the coming deluge of games, and *Masters of Modern Soccer* is an excellent place to start. Grant Wahl knows soccer, as our most prominent soccer journalist, and he spoke to some of the finest players from around the world to take a deep dive into each position on the pitch.

He starts in Germany, talking to Borussia Dortmund's Christian Pulisic. Born in Hershey, Pennsylvania, Pulisic has made a name for himself pretty much everywhere he's played in his career. Only 19, he brings a youthful energy and a thoughtful precision to his position as attacking midfielder. In contrast, defending midfielder Xabi Alonso depended on his emotional understanding of the field during his 17-year career, not caring so much for data but depending on old school risk management by controlling the small choices he made on the field.

Javier "Chicharito" Hernandez, power forward and all-time leading goal scorer for the Mexican men's national team ("El Tri"), depends on his hyperactive energy to figure out where the ball is and find a way to be in that same place. While the team manager Juan Carlos Osorio spends his time coming up with synchronized designs for plays, Chicharito understands that there is also a lot of kinetic intelligence and intuition to be in the right place at the right time.

Manchester City center back Vincent Kompany shares his secrets for being a defender. And he knows a lot of secrets--he's been studying the game since he was 6. Although he's struggled with injuries, he understands what it means to be the Master of the Castle, always defending the fort. He knows how to suffocate players, to induce their exhaustion so that they make mistakes. And he knows how to win the battle for headers (hint: it's not about jumping higher, it's about being in the spot where the ball lands. That way the ball is yours even if you don't leave the ground).

Innovative goalkeeper Manuel Neuer is an intimidating force for strikers. Tall and imposing, his presence just lets players know that they can't score against him. And add to that his habit of coming out of the box, mixing traditional goal keeping with that job of a sweeper, and you've got the new sweeper keeper model that is making its way onto soccer pitches across the world. It's risky, but Neuer has the athleticism to back it up, as well as an understanding of trigonometry to understand the angles and spacing of the pitch.

Masters of Modern Soccer also includes chapters on manager of the Belgium national team Roberto Martinez and his ability to adapt to the players and situations before him and Borussia Dortmund's sporting director Michael Zorc, who is tasked with finding the most valuable players for their budget, so they can compete with teams who have larger budgets. From the players through the top of the organization, it's all about control, intelligence, and instinct.

As soccer continues to grow in popularity and the data scientists change the way we think about the game,

it's more interesting than ever to get to peek in the backdoor and meet some of its more exciting players. Grant Wahl's *Masters of Modern Soccer* offers us access to a deeper understanding of the players and the sport so we can grow to love it even more. *Masters of Modern Soccer* is packed with information and personality, guiding us to see soccer in a fascinating new way.

Galleys for *Masters of Modern Soccer* were provided by Crown Archetype through Penguin Random House's First To Read program, with many thanks.

Windee says

I received this book as an advanced copy from First To Read in exchange for my honest review. I'd like to consider myself a soccer fan but reading this book made me realize how much I really do not know about soccer. I thought it was a pretty interesting book and definitely geared for those that love the game of soccer.

Zach says

Very solid 2nd-level book for soccer fans. So if you're American and you love the game and you've been watching for a while. Kind of basic stuff but good in-depth interviews with players and coaches and executives.

Nick says

A very American-centric look at soccer through interviews centered around of figures in the current game. As an American soccer fan I was most excited for the interviews with Christian Pulisic, which did not disappoint, and I found the selection of players (and manager and technical director) fairly interesting as a whole. I found the repeated analogies to American football a little off-putting in a book about soccer, and at times I found the chapters would go on such long tangents that I'd almost forget who was the actual focus of a section. Overall I think there were some interesting tidbits in here, but it doesn't measure up to other soccer books I've read.

Rose says

Grant Wahl is one of my favorite sports writers and I've been reading his work in *Sports Illustrated* for some time. Happily, his book retains all of the qualities that make his articles great; clean, light prose that somehow still manages to be vivid.

This book seems to be a expansion on his four part *Total Fútbol* series for SI. Perhaps this is why I felt like these profiles worked better as separate narratives. Some of the attempts to connect the players seemed forced, particularly in the case of Christian Pulisic and Xabi Alonso. Javier Hernandez and Vincent

Company worked far better as foils for each other positionally.

The writing is always most gripping when the personalities and inner thoughts of the subjects are at the forefront. The explanations of positions and roles is rather the opposite but I do understand that Wahl wanted to make this accessible to a wider audience.

I found that the interviewee largely determined the my interest the chapter. Kompany obviously has a lot more insight and experience to draw on than Pulisic, Manuel Neuer revolutionized his position, Chicharito not so much, etc. And wasn't Xabi Alonso a little hard done? His narrative is a little piecemeal in 'The Midfielders' section and snippets of his interview pop up intermittently throughout other sections of the book. Which is a shame.

If you appreciate insight into tactics and how they manifest in the minds of players and managers then you'll likely enjoy this very much! It's an interesting snapshot of the football industry.

(ARC provided by Netgalley)

Mrs. Europaea says

Even though I am a huge soccer fan, this was at times a tedious read for me.

Broken into segments such as Midfielders, Forward, Defender, etc, Wahl really details and outlines the strength of certain "master players" in these field positions and even how managers go about making such decisions for their players and strategies behind the calls. I really enjoyed the interview with Neuer. It was interesting to learn more about his thinking, his preferred equipment, and I was thoroughly amused by his discussion on socks.

That said, I really think this is a book you have to WANT to read. With the World Cup happening I think there will be many who really enjoy this, sometimes microscope, view into the popular international game.

Lance says

Long-time players and fans of soccer will notice how different the contemporary game is compared to the matches played in the 1970's and 1980's. There are several reasons for this, most notably the changes in responsibilities of the positions and the use of analytics. America's premier soccer writer, Grant Wahl, interviewed seven men who are the premier people in their position or job in international soccer and the result is this excellent book.

This book has been compared to the best-selling baseball book "Men At Work" by George Will. In that one, Will broke down baseball by writing about various jobs done by people in the game and wrote about how the best performers handle that job. Wahl does the same thing for soccer as he interviews the best players and management personnel. The players are American midfielder Christian Pulisic, Mexican forward Javier "Chicharito" Hernandez, Belgian centerback Vincent Kompany, Spain's Xabi Alonso and German goalkeeper Manuel Neuer.

Their insight into the game makes for compelling reading as they each share what they do to be the best at their position. Whether it is how Kompany positions himself in relation to the opponent's best goal scorer, the "Wow moments" Pulisic provides to fans or the drills on which Neuer works to improve his reflexes, each section is a lesson in how today's game is played and why the sport has changed so much over the last few decades.

These changes are noted often by Wahl as he talks about positions that are no longer in vogue, such as the sweeper, or how drastically the skills have changed in order to be an elite player. This is clearly evident for a goalkeeper, where Wahl writes that shot blocking, once considered the primary job of the keeper, is now only one of several skills at which a goalkeeper must excel. Neuer's insight backs up this assertion.

Coaching and management get the same treatment as players do in this book as Belgium coach Roberto Martinez and Borussia Dortmund sporting director Michael Zorc are also interviewed and share their secrets for success as well. The biggest takeaway from these chapters was also mentioned in some of the players' chapters. The use of advanced statistical analysis is just as prevalent in professional soccer as it is in other sports, again most notably baseball. There is even a reference to "Moneyball" in the book as much like the Oakland A's, Borussia Dortmund does not have the same financial resources like some other clubs like Manchester United, Real Madrid or Barcelona. As a result, they do some creative thinking in the front office and Zorc's insight will provide readers with some new information about this part of the sport.

Written with American readers in mind, this work is truly a masterpiece of the modern game. Wahl was the first author to write a soccer book that became a New York Times bestseller with his 2009 biography of David Beckham. This book could very well become his second. If a reader has any interest in the sport, no matter how much or how little, this is a book that must not be missed.

I wish to thank Crown Publishing for providing a copy of the book via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

<http://sportsbookguy.blogspot.com/201...>

Donna Hines says

"In the twenty first century you can hail from anywhere on the planet, even Hershey, PA and become a master of modern soccer."

The modern game has changed as players are becoming more physical, inundated with higher salaried, larger commercialization, with worldwide audiences.

Positions are very specialized, choreography is intense, the thrill to win is demanding.

"The US has never produced a global men's soccer superstar."

Christian Pulisic is the closest they have come to achieving such a task. Christian is different from others in that he doesn't let his ego take front and center stage.

You need poise, you need intellect, you need attention to details while studying your opponents every move prior to playing them.

Attack and Defense are simultaneously played and inextricably linked.

Stay tough, arrogant, determined, and do such long after your win. Competitive inner drive is what allows the opening to the top.

For coaches and or managers the passion has to be present. It cannot be a timed practice and then go home situation.

The drive has to be there, the studying of your players even during practice must be enhanced, the use of limited resources to best of ability getting creative in the promise is the pathway to success.

While I must admit I've only tried soccer, I did grow up in Bear Creek Pa a rural area that pushed it's soccer. I have mad respect for the game as I was exhausted just training to play in practice and learning the ropes.

Grant Wahl wrote in a way that not only was enlightening but realistic in the sense I felt like I was part of the team.

When you can utilize your words to educate, inform, provide a new sense of appreciation -- you have succeeded!

You can mix modern teachings with a business model in combining old school talent and get the win and that's something that should be built upon.

Thank you to Grant Wahl for this ARC SIGNED HARDCOVER COPY in exchange for this honest review as well as his publisher.

This copy will be donated to The Hoyt Library in loving memory of my niece Cassie Ann Gatcha.

Kimberly Brooks says

Interesting if you're a fan of soccer...if not, parts may be hard to follow. I liked reading about their thoughts on the game and other players, but the technical side of the game lost me a bit (and as the wife of a soccer coach I watch and understand a lot).

Fausto Betances says

Misleading title. This book was not as much about the game of football as it was a compilation of experiences from specific individuals. The author focused on the greatness of good moments from those individuals and much less on anything else.

Paulcbry says

It is more enjoyable to watch soccer than to read about it. That being said, it is a fascinating look at the Euro version of soccer by an author who has done his research. Well written and well worth reading (though a bit dry in spots).

Frank says

Wahl interviews word class players from different positions, a coach, and a director of football to get insights into the game behind the game. Very informative if you're trying to understand the sport beyond the basics.
