

Book Review of “HARDBALL”

Matthews, Christopher (1999). *Hardball : how politics is played, told by one who knows the game* (1st Touchstone ed. ed.). New York: Simon & Schuster.

Hardball was published in 1988 and was written by Chris Matthews. Chris Matthews himself has over 17 years of experience in the political world, having spent a lot of time in Washington in various capacities; as aide to Senator Frank E. Moss, presidential speech writer as well as chief spokesman for Tip O’Neill. This book encompasses his life’s experience in politics and outlines the darker side of this world.

The title of the book Hardball in itself is quite significant as it actually communicates the core concept of the book. Chris Matthews has in a very interesting manner, depicted how to play the game of politics; not just politics but hard or dirty politics. Matthews aims to enlighten his reader on how to be politically successful by adopting the right strategies and techniques. Most of them may not be ethical but then, the world of politics does not run on ethics. Quite a few of the tactics that Matthews outlines, can in fact, be even used in general life. Some of the core concepts that Matthews outlines in his book include the importance of making the right friends to help you get ahead, to take favors in the right way, to keep your enemies in front of you, focus on getting ahead and so on.

A few of the tactics outlined are quite interesting for instance when he talks about keeping your enemies in front of you. He gives the example of President Reagan and how he appointed James Baker the White House Chief of Staff knowing that Baker was against Reagan

and had teamed up with Gerald Ford and George Bush. But according to Matthews, the key to your success in politics is to keep your enemies in front of you.

In his hardball style, Matthews also talks about how politicians play with the economy according to the political cycles. He writes in his book, “Did you ever notice that swings in the economy nearly correspond to the political calendar? Recessions usually occur in the first year after a president wins an election. Recoveries are timed to reach full vigor as the country is poised for a new political season. A president knows that he must complete his term on an economic upswing. If he is going to squeeze out the inflation and cut some benefit programs, he'd better do it right up front so that the pain is forgotten by the next election.”(pp. 83-84)

Matthews outlines similar concepts throughout his book. He talks about his theory of Spin which he states is “defining the events in the most self-serving way possible.” (p. 171). Although everyone does know politics is dirty, Matthews in his unique style and by using real life examples of how many politicians, over the years, have incorporated the tactics he talks about, has made it interesting to read. I would not say this book is boring at all. Some of the tactics may not be very respectful, but then politics never is. Matthews has simply tried to encapsulate his seventeen years of experience in the political world and has presented a realistic narration of how successful politicians are those who know how to play “Hardball!”