

Book Review: The Mosquito Bowl
By Buzz Bissinger

Never judge a book by its cover. That's good advice, literally and figuratively.

Here's some more.

Never judge a book by its title, and never judge a book based on the author's prior work – literally.

Case in point? “The Mosquito Bowl” by Buzz Bissinger. The blurb on the book's jacket details how on Christmas eve in 1944, members of the 4th and 29th Marine Regiments engaged in a “bruising and bloody” football game that became known as the Mosquito Bowl. Turns out those regiments were comprised of dozens of high-level college football players; former All-American players and captains from Purdue, Cornell, Notre Dame, and Wisconsin. When the trash talking reached a fevered pitch while training for an upcoming invasion of Okinawa, the game was scheduled to settle the score.

Sounds intriguing, right? Especially since Bissinger also authored “Friday Night Lights,” an excellent book which paid homage to high school football.

This time around, Bissinger comes up short. The actual game is covered in only one, very short chapter. There are few specifics about the game that ended in a 0-0 tie. That's a huge let down given the book's title and sub-title: a game of life and death in World War II.

What the book *does* do well, just as Bissinger did in “Friday Night Lights,” is provide in-depth insight into the lives of many of these young men who made huge sacrifices. Who left behind families and potential pro football careers to fight – and in many cases, die – for their country. There are no household names here, and readers will

likely never have heard of any of these men. But Bissinger brings them to life to the point where you not only root for them in battle, but mourn for those who do not make it. And he does so with his vivid writing style that places you there in the trenches alongside the wounded and the dying. He gets you to *care* bout them.

The book indicates that 65 of the Marines who played in the Mosquito Bowl had college football backgrounds. A couple had even played briefly for the New York Giants. But 15 of them would never make it back home to their families. And nearly 13,000 died in the battle on Okinawa.

So, it depends what you're looking for. As a factual account of the months leading up to the intense three-month battle on the Japanese island of Okinawa, and the bloodshed that occurred within, it's an informative read. An in-depth look at a key turning point in the fighting in the Pacific during World War II, and the men who fought and died on that island.

But if you're thinking football, as I was when I saw the title and author's name, you'll likely be disappointed.

I give "The Mosquito Bowl" 3.5 out of 5 stars. If you decide to tackle it, I welcome your feedback.