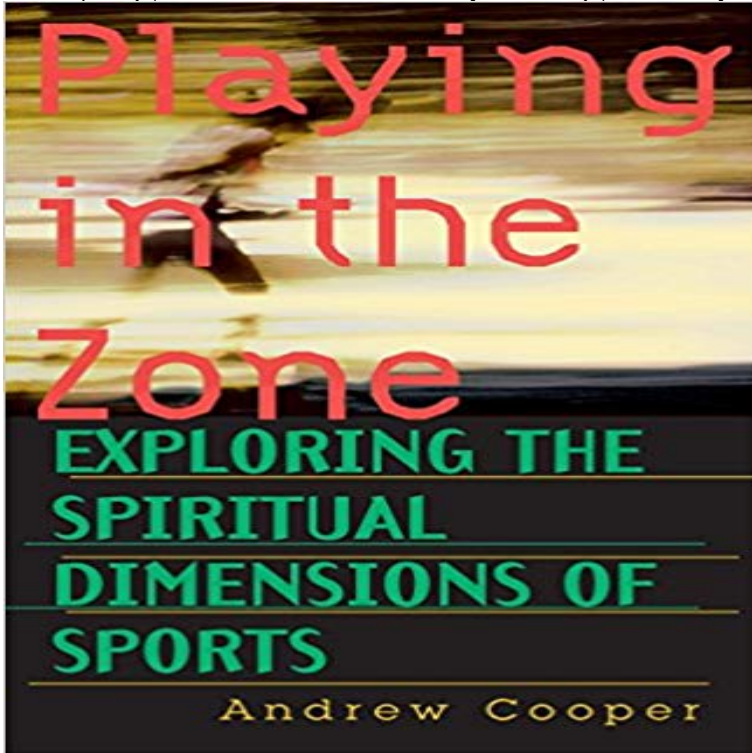


## Playing in the Zone: Exploring the Spiritual Dimensions of Sports



Our ancient ancestors believed that sports were a gift of the gods that they were potent rituals, which, if performed correctly, would placate unseen powers, honor departed heroes, or improve the harvests. Today, sports still speak to deep yearnings, imaginings, and the irreducible need people feel to resonate with themselves and their world. But the hidden meaning, or secret life, that lies at the heart of sports and gives them their force and magic goes largely unnoticed. The old baseball hand Wes Westrum once said, Baseball is like church. Many attend, but few understand and the same could be said for sports in general. In *Playing in the Zone*, Andrew Cooper explores this inner dimension of sports, drawing on mythology, the history of religion, his observations on popular culture, and a wonderful array of stories and anecdotes about the world's most accomplished athletes. The author, a clinical psychologist and longtime Zen student, compares the intense focus of the mind that is often required in spiritual practice with the experience of playing in the zone, that quality of mind where the most remarkable athletic feats seem to occur effortlessly. He explores the dark side of sports, its brutality and violence, showing how it can also provide fertile ground for self-awareness and self-transformation. Particularly insightful is the author's discussion of how the heightened drama of sports offers a powerful vehicle for the expression of mythic imagery and symbols in popular culture.

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