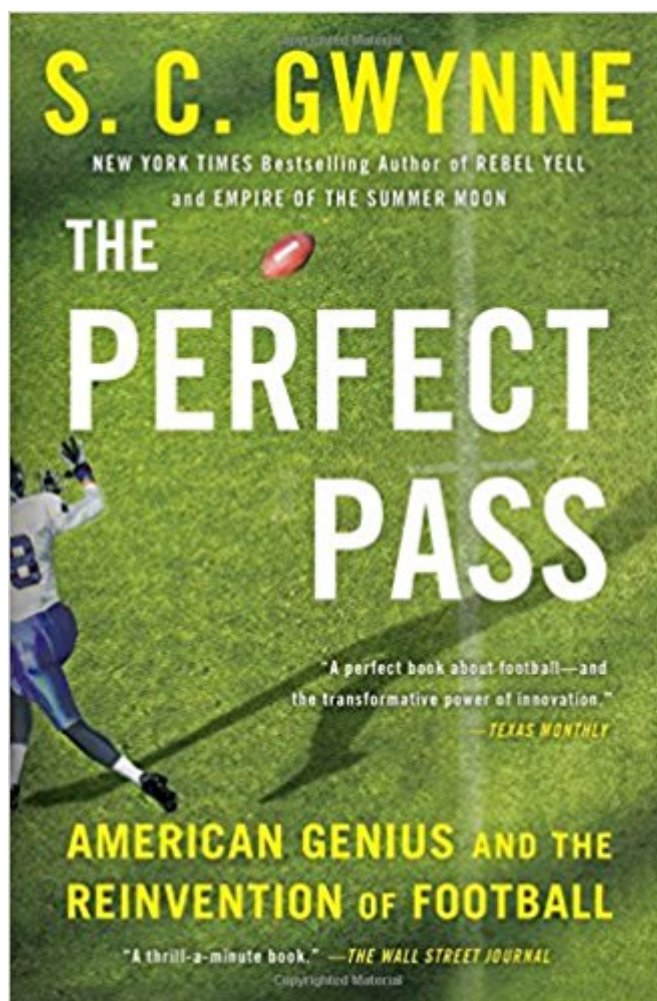


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# The Perfect Pass: American Genius And The Reinvention Of Football



## Synopsis

An “excellent sports history” (Publishers Weekly) in the tradition of Michael Lewis’s Moneyball, award-winning historian S.C. Gwynne tells the incredible story of how two unknown coaches revolutionized American football at every level, from high school to the NFL. Hal Mumme spent fourteen mostly losing seasons coaching football before inventing a potent passing offense that would soon shock players, delight fans, and terrify opposing coaches. It all began at a tiny, overlooked college called Iowa Wesleyan, where Mumme was head coach and Mike Leach, a lawyer who had never played college football, was hired as his offensive line coach. In the cornfields of Iowa these two mad inventors, drawn together by a shared disregard for conventionalism and a love for Jimmy Buffett, began to engineer the purest, most extreme passing game in the 145-year history of football. Implementing their “Air Raid” offense, their teams—at Iowa Wesleyan and later at Valdosta State and the University of Kentucky—played blazingly fast—faster than any team ever had before, and they routinely beat teams with far more talented athletes. And Mumme and Leach did it all without even a playbook. “A superb treat for all gridiron fans” (Kirkus Reviews, starred review), The Perfect Pass S.C. Gwynne explores Mumme’s leading role in changing football from a run-dominated sport to a pass-dominated one, the game that tens of millions of Americans now watch every fall weekend. Whether you’re a casual or ravenous football fan, this is “a rousing tale of innovation” (Booklist), and “Gwynne’s book ably relates the story of that innovation and the successes of the man who devised it” (New York Journal of Books).

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The most entertaining book on football this decade." [Allen Barra](#), [The Dallas Morning News](#) "A thrill-a-minute book...Along with his protogé Mike Leach, now the head coach at Washington State University, Mr. Mumme revolutionized their sport in ways that, frankly, dwarf the legacy of Billy Beane and his gang from [Moneyball](#)." [The Wall Street Journal](#) "Excellent sports history . . . an inspiring reminder that great ideas don't automatically permeate the existing ideology. Sometimes a devoted few must pursue their principles with diligence, even if they don't get the glory." [Publishers Weekly](#) "It is undeniable that the Air Raid, the fast passing game, and the frequency of the forward pass are now imprinted on football, especially, as Gwynne notes, on the college level though also in the NFL. That makes his subtitle all the more fitting, for undeniably, the two coaches changed the game and brought glory to their institutions. A superb treat for all gridiron fans." [Kirkus Reviews](#) (starred review) "A rousing tale of innovation finding success in the face of the gale-force winds of convention." [Booklist](#) "The Perfect Pass is a perfect book about football and the transformative power of innovation. S.C. Gwynne brings the same remarkable reporting and storytelling skills he used in *Empire of the Summer Moon* and *Rebel Yell* to reveal the dramatic history behind the passing revolution that disrupted and forever changed America's favorite sport. His portrait of Hal Mumme, the unknown underdog coach who unleashed the Air Raid offense on the modern game, is superb, at once capturing the passion and genius that made him an unsung hero of his generation." [Brian D. Sweany](#), editor in chief, *Texas Monthly* "When we played against a Hal Mumme offense, our defense had to be changed dramatically. You had to throw away everything you knew or you were going to get beat. Every offensive coordinator and defensive coordinator in football better study this book to find out why." [Jerry Glanville](#), former NFL and college head coach "Being a football coach who innovates against the way the game has long been played is deeply challenging. S.C. Gwynne captures perfectly how Hal Mumme's Air Raid offense helped change the landscape of college football forever. It's a great story." [Bruce Arians](#), head coach, [Arizona Cardinals](#) "Hal Mumme has always been a true American genius, and every year teams running his offense are among the tops in yards and points. I know, because I would've liked to have hired him. He has a brilliant football mind, and here at last is his amazing story, told in full." [Bob Stoops](#), head coach, University of Oklahoma "If you are a coach, a manager, an entrepreneur, an

executive, an MBA student, etc. looking for a real life example of thinking way outside the box and changing your industry or field completely, then *The Perfect Pass* is the book for you. Read it, digest it, and then apply it to your life—your work." •Texas History Page

The tale of Hal Mumme and how he changed American football is a David and Goliath story with similarities to Michael Lewis's *Moneyball: The Art of Winning an Unfair Game*, about the Oakland Athletics baseball team and its number-crunching general manager, Billy Beane. That was a different sport and era, but both Beane and Mumme found themselves in underdog positions and used creative, out-of-the-box thinking to level the playing field." •Houston Press

"Informative and entertaining and a must read for anyone interested in the inner game of football strategy....If you are a football coach, football fan or simply a guy who likes a good story, S.C. Gwynne scored a touchdown." •Tony DeMeo, *American Football Monthly*

S.C. Gwynne is the author of the New York Times bestsellers *Rebel Yell* and *Empire of the Summer Moon*, which was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award. He spent most of his career as a journalist, including stints with *Time* as bureau chief, national correspondent, and senior editor, and with *Texas Monthly* as executive editor. He lives in Austin, Texas, with his wife.

It may as well have been called "portrait of the artist as a young coach," because that's what Hal Mumme is: an artist whose medium is football. He likes to win, but more than winning, he is a man who once had a vision of football transforming football from a brutal scrum and into a passionate display of arial perfection and commitment and, after years of toil and study, he achieved his vision. Along the way he and his teams bucked orthodoxies at every turn, sometimes apparently just for the sake of being different, and also broke nearly every passing record possible, and revolutionized the game even while he was exiled from the big time himself. More than just the story of Mumme, though, Gwynne delves deep into the history of the forward pass in football, from its legalization (and disdain) in the early 20th century and its evolution through famous figures like Bill Walsh, LaVell Edwards, and Mouse Davis to more obscure names like Jack Neumeier, Red Faught, and Dutch Meyer. He traces the evolution and slow uptick in passing throughout the decades, even as the pioneers who aired it faced constant skepticism from purists who thought their approach wasn't merely unsound strategy, but also faintly immoral. We see the young Mumme giving up a lucrative sales job as a young man to embark on his personal odyssey in coaching, paying his dues through a string of hard-won but precarious jobs that paid next to nothing, as he met and studied the works

of those masters who'd came before. All of it to pursue a vision that began as both a passion and a vague notion: to throw the football and throw it more often and better than anyone had ever done before. This book tells the story of Mumme toiling in obscurity, constantly studying and criss-crossing the country to learn and refine his system, putting in the time in the woodshed like all great artists do. This is a good read for anyone interested in studying the history of the passing game. Gwynne's style is crisp and a fun read, but don't expect a lot of memorable turns of phrase here. Some of the history that Gwynne cites in regards to Mumme also seems to be fudged a bit, and with little knowledge of his subject before he began writing this book, Gwynne seems to heap a bit too much praise and credit onto Mumme, delving into constant hyperbole while glossing over the man's faults and failings (which would make him a more interesting subject of a biography) and ending, oddly, on Mumme's high point as a coach: his first Kentucky team's 1997 upset of Alabama (which was in the middle of one of its worst seasons in years, it turns out, but Gwynne doesn't tell you that, either) that came in the midst of a 5-7 season. That's odd because the next 19 years of Mumme's career, which was a spectacular fall from grace that is probably a compelling book in its own right, gets glossed over in a brief epilogue at the end, such as when he says that Kentucky team in 2001 had lost a lot of talent the year before (justifying the 2-9 record), but he fails to mention that Mumme brought much of that on himself by running off players and, inexplicably, benching his returning All SEC QB Dustin Bonner in favor of 300lb freshman interception machine Jared Lorenzen. Hal Mumme is a brilliant, fascinating, transformative figure in football history whose career has been tragically defined by his own hubris and apparent inability to get out of his own way, but Gwynne doesn't even touch upon that angle here, leaving this book a shell of what it could have been. Gwynne also fails to delve into the reasons why the Air Raid offense, which has traditionally had a pretty mediocre record in terms of winning percentage, continued to spread and grow ever more popular even as Mumme's star fell further and further. The lack of any mention of Tony Franklin, an assistant coach who was a big part of Mumme's downfall at Kentucky and later popularized the offense by packaging and selling it to high school and college coaches eager to learn "the system" also seems like a glaring omission. Still, if you want to learn how the passing game evolved into the wide open offenses we see everywhere today or come to a better understanding of how art and football intersect, you will definitely want to read this book.

Great book. Although i do not agree with all of Gwynne's observations on why the passing game has had such a difficult time in becoming the dominating offensive concept in football, his facts are great. He explains quickly and simply the transformation of offensive thought. He includes some

folks that usually get left out like "Dutch Meyer." Hal Mumme was and is a difference maker. His story so remarkable and the sacrifices he made to develop it were so significant, that they need to be told. Gwynne has done it. As a veteran Texas High School coach and a friend of Hal Mumme and several of the characters in the book I say "well done and thanks."

I give out very few 5 stars to books, but that's what I'm giving here. This was simply a great read. If you're old enough to have followed football for a few decades, you know the passing game has somehow grown from an afterthought to the dominant mode of play, making football more exciting than ever (and if you don't believe me about the exciting part, just watch some 1960s college game on ESPN Classic and prepare for a nice snooze). I recall in the 1990s arguing that the passing game was really taking off and a friend actually argued against me. Well I was right but I wish I had known then all the details I know now, having read this book. It tells a lot of the story about how that happened and the personalities driving the change. And it might just make you want to run to the nearest Division III stadium to see what's up at the scrappiest level of play.

Fantastic story of Hal Mumme and his revolutionary 'Air Raid' pass all the time system that has, to hear tell it, revolutionized the NFL. In telling the tale, you also get the STRONG inference that the book is about more than that, it's about revolutionary thinking, as the Air Raid was so radically different from the rules of football that it couldn't succeed. Some great imagery - of Mumme in a trailer coaching small schools, of linemen standing in odd formations, confused defenses, crazy wins and botched-up silly plays. Mumme facing rejection and surprisingly poor treatment, the laughs of the college football world turned to acclaim. He was not an 'overnight success' and Gwynne tells the long tale from bottom to top. Only critique is would have liked a bit more explanation of the influence on the NFL, not sure case was made.

This is a fun look at a coach and his vision of changing the game of football. The Perfect Pass introduces us to Hal Mumme who focused his efforts of the air attack vs the ground game. It is a fun read to see the development of his various teams at high school and college levels as well as the influence he has had on the game today. The book includes detailed plays and formations as well as how they were implemented against unprepared defenses. A quick read on a part of the history of the game.

Hal Mumme is an American Original. And leave it to S.C. to chronicle his story as only S.C. can.

This book is nothing short of incredible. What Hal and Mike Leach did in an Iowa cornfield is college football's version of what Ben Franklin did with electricity or Albert Einstein did with time and space. It literally changed the whole sport as we knew it. As a sports journalist who got to cover Hal his entire career, there is one thing that always stood out to me. It wasn't how he engineered a West Texas State offense to upset Jimmy Johnson and Oklahoma State. It wasn't how he engineered a UTEP offense to defeat a BYU team thought to be untouchable. It wasn't leading Kentucky to a stunning upset of Alabama. It was the SEC pre-season press meetings in Birmingham. Coaches like Gene Stallings or Steve Spurrier or Phil Fulmer used to show up in \$1,500 tailor-made three piece suits. Hal would show up in a \$45 polo shirt and clearly wasn't on hand to try to disingenuously impress anyone. That's who he was and he wasn't going to go out of his way to try to be something else. He has to be the most unpretentious person I ever covered. His story needed to be told, and I thank S.C. for having the intuition to do it.

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