



Invisible No More: A Historical Novel

Scott Pitoniak

Rick Burton

Subplot

(340pp)

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In the historical novel Invisible No More, an ambitious journalist discovers the truth about a forgotten sports hero.

In Scott Pitoniak and Rick Burton's optimistic historical novel *Invisible No More*, a promising journalist discovers the forgotten story of an amazing athlete.

Herein, Breanna, a smart journalist, reports on the true but forgotten story of Wilmeth Sidat-Singh, who was born almost a century before her. He was a college athlete—one of Syracuse University's brightest sports stars. He was also one of the first Black college quarterbacks and a stellar student who was studying to be a doctor. But Sidat-Singh died very young while flying a plane on a training mission over Lake Huron for the US Army.

Breanna's story parallels Sidat-Singh's with its themes: both achieve success despite suffering the burden of ongoing racism. Breanna's boyfriend, Erik, is white, and well-meaning though somewhat tone deaf. Her boss, Stanley, is racist. Her story is fleshed out by those who remember Sidat-Singh and the world he contended with, including Charles, a captain who witnessed his demise, and several of Sidat-Singh's friends and adversaries, as with Mercer, the son of Duke Ellington; Jon, a childhood friend; and Sam, a sports writer who outs Sidat-Singh as Black (the university had presented him as "Hindu," an older term Americans used for all people from India, because Indians were more acceptable to the white majority). Historical figures also factor in, as with Sidat-Singh's famed football coach Roy Simmons II and his teammate Marty Glickman, the latter of whom faced prejudice because he was Jewish. But many of the book's secondary characters make brief appearances; as characters in their own rights, they are underdeveloped.

The omniscient narration is journalistic in tone, emphasizing the amazing strength and optimism that Sidat-Singh had as a gifted athlete who was hopeful about his future despite the racial discrimination he faced. Indeed, its historical revelations are its most distinguishing quality: the book notes that Sidat-Singh was benched by his coach because the other team refused to compete against Black players; it recalls that he became a pilot with the Tuskegee Airmen. Sports metaphors abound, though distracting clichés are incorporated as well, as with the use of "sticks and stones" and "it was his [the coach's] way or the highway." Still, the book's climax, which features a game between Syracuse and the favored Cornell team, is riveting.

In the historical novel *Invisible No More*, an ambitious journalist discovers the truth about a forgotten sports hero—and her own power and talent as a writer.

NATALIE MARINO (October 23, 2023)

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