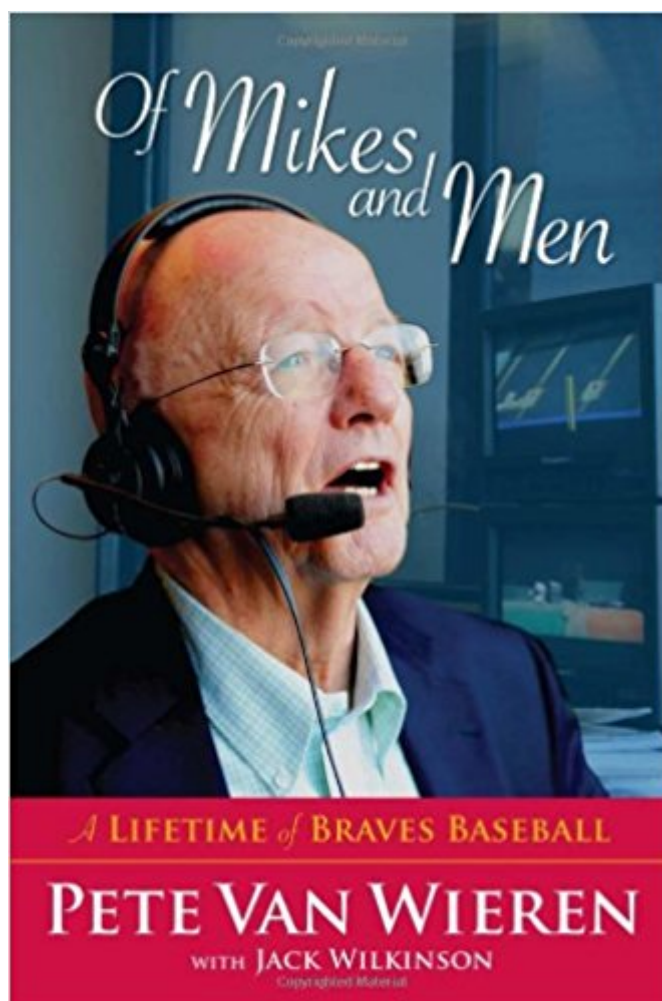


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Of Mikes And Men: A Lifetime Of Braves Baseball



Synopsis

The extraordinary life of an Atlanta Braves Hall of Fame broadcaster is shared in this firsthand account of the highs and lows of Major League Baseball. Pete Van Wieren's legacy began in 1976, when he and a young Skip Caray were hired to call Atlanta Braves games. During the next three decades, "the Professor" and Caray became the voices of a team known nationwide as America's Team courtesy of Ted Turner's SuperStation TBS. In this heartfelt autobiography, Van Wieren shares his memories of thrilling moments in Braves history, such as the 1995 season when the Braves won the world championship; the pitching mastery of Greg Maddux, Tom Glavine, and John Smoltz; the heartbreak of the 1996 World Series loss to the Yankees; and Atlanta's unprecedented run of 14 consecutive division titles.

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Customer Reviews

Pete Van Wieren is the former play-by-play voice of the Atlanta Braves. He is an 11-time winner of the Georgia Sportscaster of the Year Award and was inducted into the Braves Hall of Fame in 2004. He lives in Alpharetta, Georgia. Jack Wilkinson is an official scorer for the Atlanta Braves at Turner Field and has worked for newspapers in Miami, Chicago, New York, and Atlanta. He is a three-time Georgia Sportswriter of the Year.

The Atlanta Braves are my favorite team in all of sports, and Pete Van Wieren (aka "The Professor") was my favorite of their TV and radio announcers. During his career, he was always the one with the facts and figures, while his partners brought the humor (Skip Caray) or the former-player

perspective (first Ernie Johnson, then Don Sutton and Joe Simpson). As such, his biography proceeds in a matter-of-fact manner. It is apparent through the pages that there are certain individuals that he did not particularly care for, and while he does not sugarcoat this, he manages to mostly stay away from the tell-all, mudslinging approach. Indeed, the most negative remarks are reserved for his father (read the book, and you'll understand why), and even those are fairly reserved compared to a lot of tell-all biographies. I admit that being a diehard Braves fan gives me a certain bias here, and I'm not sure how this book would go over with those unfamiliar with the team. If you happen to be a Braves fan, however, this is worth reading.

Having been a fan of Peter Van Wieren's "Diamond Notes" for the Atlanta Braves and his play by play style, his autobiography provides insight into his world of sports broadcasting and the remarkable downs and ups of the Atlanta Braves during a significant portion of his 33 year career. Reading his book co-authored with Jack Wilkinson, one of Atlanta's finest sports writers, the reader can hear his voice again as he recounts life in the booth working with and reporting about rather remarkable characters on and off the field. By no means a tell all book other than some tough personal history, the book reflects his love for the game, the people in it and his dedication to truthfully telling the story of what is happening on the field. Braves' fans will love the book as a chance to reconnect with a favorite voice and remember amazing moments of Braves history, both sublime and ridiculous, while also reading a revealing history of the personalities and economics of sports programming as Ted Turner changed sports media through TBS.

This is exactly what any fan of the Braves during Pete's run would hope it would be. It's a solid balance between an autobiography of Pete and retelling of the team's history of the last 35 years. As if we didn't already feel like Pete was a close friend, we now get an inside look at some of the things about his life and career that we didn't get to learn during any of the games. I am 28 years old so 1990 was my first year as a Braves fan. Living in GA, I was there for the fabled 14 clinches. This book soaked me in nostalgia and brought back some memories I had almost forgotten. It also left me wanting to write Pete a letter just to thank him for the journey. Can't lie - I shed a few tears in the chapter focusing on the loss of Skip Caray.

Of Mikes and Men, an autobiography by long-time Braves announcer Pete Van Wieren, will undoubtedly be of interest to most Atlanta Braves fans. Unfortunately, the book doesn't live up to my admittedly high expectations. While his book is solid, it is wholly unremarkable. It is competent, it is

professional, but through most of the pages, it is lacking in both heart and surprisingly, for the man Braves fans know as "The Professor", in depth. As anyone who watched a Braves broadcast during the many years he sat behind the mic knows, Pete's steady hand was the anchor of every Atlanta Braves broadcasts. He was the perfect counter to Ernie Johnson's homer and Skip Carray's smart-ass. His book lets him down. The majority of the book is dedicated to the Braves run of fourteen straight division titles, and this portion of the book tends to be a simple litany of facts written in prose, when a list would have sufficed. Perhaps this is a misjudgment of audience? The people most likely to read this book, Braves fans, already know about the constant World Series disappointments. Pete, who was there for the whole run and would often have morning coffee with Bobby Cox, doesn't offer any in depth analysis into why the Braves were able to win their division so often, or why they failed in the post-season so often. He just mentions that they did. Likewise, the early portion of his career is skimmed over with mentions of a few famous games (like the brawl-a-thon with the Padres or the billion-inning affair against the Mets where Rick Camp hit a grand slam to keep the game going ... Braves fans know the games) without offering any insight into the games or even recreating them in the kind of language that would make them come alive. As good as the Braves were from 1991 to 2005, they were largely that bad from 1974 to 1990 (excepting a few seasons here and there). You would think Pete might be able to offer some insight into why the Braves would struggle continuously throughout this period. I had hoped he might offer his opinions on that ridiculous contract Ted Turner gave Claudell Washington, into the Brett Butler trade, into the Len Barker and Bruce Sutter disasters. No. We are told the Braves stunk and there you have it. Most disappointing though is the lack of really good, juicy stories. For a man who shared morning coffees for years with Bobby Cox, there might be an actual story to tell ... a conversation to recall. I was especially crushed by the lack of great Skip stories. Pete and Skip were on-air partners for years and they would become the best of friends. They were both characters in their way, and we know from Pete's many interviews following Skip's untimely passing that he has some great stories, but the book is lacking them. It seems like a missed opportunity that any Braves fan would wish Pete had taken. The book works best on those all too few occasions where Pete allows his emotion to show up on the page. He does a great job of conveying his hurt and anger at his father who abandoned Pete and his Mom. He delivers a broadside against the TBS executives who decided that he and Skip Carray were not suitable for a national broadcast and took them off the air, only to be forced to put them back on after a true national outcry. Best of all is his amazingly thorough put down of that odious box of crap John Rocker. He truly got under Pete's skin and Pete did not hide his feelings and seems to wish the Braves had dumped the jack-ass from the start of

the problem. Reading back over this review, it seems unnecessarily harsh. I don't want to convey that the book is a bad read at all. Pete is an affable and professional guy and that comes through. He also does a great job of conveying how fortunate he was to have the job he did. He loved almost every minute of it. He was especially grateful to the fans for their support over the years, and especially when he was removed from the air. For me, Pete, along with Skip, will always be the "voice of the Braves". I'm sure any Braves fans will, despite the shortcomings, enjoy the book. Hopefully, they'll be another book where Pete can expand and expound on his years with the Braves.

I fully expected more behind the scene stories and antidotes. Instead it was a chronology of Pete's life and hatred for his father. Sure there were some clean stories he could have told that would not have embarrassed past Braves or announcers. I think he totally missed an opportunity to give a tribute to Skip, who we all miss. I was not expecting a Ball Four or Bronx Zoo "tell all" book but dang, how about some insight into the life and times of a big league broadcaster? It was a quick read is the best I can say. When Don Sutton writes his book, I sure hope it has a lot of sidebar crazy stories.

Brought back so many good memories. Pete did a wonderful job in bringing those memories back to life and adding a lot of interesting details. I felt it was well written. I miss him and his voice and analysis. He was way above average in calling a game. A good man. I had a hard time setting it down. EXCELLENT!

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