



Chasing Water: Elegy of an Olympian

Anthony Ervin , Constantine Markides

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“Here Ervin and swim trainer and journalist Markides combine talents to create a biography that is part first-hand narrative by Ervin, with Markides filling in the details and providing context. The formula works, pulling readers into Ervin’s experience of the thrill of victory and search for meaning. . . . Featuring more depth, breadth, truth, and the effects of reckless choices than found in traditional athlete biographies, this gripping account is just in time for the gear up to the Rio 2016 Olympics. Readers will understand the psyche and life of elite athletes as never before, then cheer Ervin on in his attempt to make another Olympic team.”

-- *Library Journal*

“A celebrated Olympian recounts how he rose to the top of his sport, crashed, and found redemption. . . . This book, which tells his story through a narrative that interweaves the former gold medalist’s memories with commentary by his friend and colleague Markides, reveals the extreme highs and lows that characterized Ervin’s remarkable life and career. . . . The author never flinches at revealing his less-than-perfect past, and the humility he demonstrates at coming to terms with his own egotism and personal shortcomings makes the book frequently compelling. A provocative and refreshingly honest redemption memoir.”

-- *Kirkus Reviews*

“Markides smartly combines his own journalistic account with a parallel narrative in which Ervin . . . explains his life and style. Some talents simply defy explanation, however, and Ervin may be in that category. . . . The story of his comeback at 31 (ancient for a swimmer) is rendered more amazing by the contrast with what went before.”

-- *Booklist*

"For Anthony Ervin, the stretch between his two greatest athletic achievements — two Olympic gold medals — included a suicide attempt, a period of homelessness and a stint in a rock band. Jobs found, then lost. Too much drinking, too many drugs. Depression. Confusion. And then, a kind of rebirth."

-- *USA Today*

"An inspiring, humorous and often profound biography."

-- *People Magazine*

"Anthony Ervin is a lot of things. He is an open book and a closed circuit, a body fueled by a brain, an old man with a young soul. He is the American Dream. He is, once again, improbably, an Olympic champion."

-- *Yahoo*

"[Ervin's] story is an amazing comeback tale."

-- *Huffington Post*

Every four years in the Olympic cycle the surge of national interest in swimming grows, and with it a desire to be captivated by its stars. This book tells the dramatic, surprising, and sometimes provocative path that Anthony Ervin has taken to become one of those captivating Olympic heroes. Not your typical sports memoir, *Chasing Water* also contains arresting black-and-white drawings and a graphic story extra, as well

as an inventive and mercurial narrative style that morphs chapter by chapter to reflect Ervin's restless, multifaceted life.

Ervin won a gold medal at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games at the age of nineteen. He is an athlete branded with a slew of titles including being the first US Olympic swimmer of African American descent, along with Jewish heritage, who also grew up with Tourette's syndrome. He shocked the sporting world by retiring soon after claiming two world titles following the 2000 Olympics. Auctioning off his gold medal for charity, he set off on a part spiritual quest, part self-destructive bender that involved Zen temples, fast motorcycles, tattoo parlors, and rock 'n' roll bands. Then Ervin resurfaced in 2012 to not only make the US Olympic team twelve years after his first appearance, but to continue his career by swimming faster than ever before.

Chasing Water: Elegy of an Olympian Details

Date : Published April 5th 2016 by Edge of Sports

ISBN : 9781617754449

Author : Anthony Ervin , Constantine Markides

Format : Paperback 320 pages

Genre : Sports and Games, Sports, Autobiography, Memoir, Nonfiction, Biography

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Alison Donnelly says

Preface: I'm not a huge sports fan. I'm a huge people fan. I first came across Ervin in a Rolling Stone article many years ago and I was struck by his unusual and unconventional life story. This biography will sate those who read it because they are interested in swimming, those who read it because they are looking for the antidote to Ryan Lochte's Olympic level idiocy, or just anyone curious about a very interesting person. Ervin is thoughtful, thankful, and seems constantly in awe of the universe. I like him. Definitely not your typical sporting memoir, more of a biographical bildungsroman for sure, but one you'll be glad you picked up.

Chris says

So much swimming in here I could understand, and many highlight worthy revelations. I also think my son is very similar to Ervin in many ways, as a biracial 20-year-old, trying to find his way.

Amanda Morgan says

I think I appreciated this memoir of US Olympic swimmer Anthony Ervin because I am a former competitive swimmer and understand the swimming lingo and the dedication it takes to excel in this sport, but non-swimmers will also be informed and amused by Ervin's tales.

Ervin talks about what a hooligan he was growing up and how swimming kept him out of more trouble he could have been into. His love/hate relationship with the sport resonates with me, as I'm sure it would with other athletes who had to train hours upon hours a day to try to get ahead in a sport you once loved but come to resent at times.

When an opportunity presented itself to Ervin for a free ride to college if only he would continue swimming competitively, he took it with the intent to continue swimming for one year, then move on with his life. That one year led to an Olympic gold medal and some hard partying.

While Ervin didn't finish college in the traditional means, he did eventually realize what college and swimming meant to him and made his way back to them both after many years of partying, drugs, and transient living.

Ervin and his co-writer are both interesting writers with a sense of humor and this book makes for a quick read in which I found myself rooting for Ervin and his don't-call-it-a-comeback, looking forward to more success for this truly interesting human being. I was happy to have won a copy of this book from LibraryThing.

Eileen Granfors says

Anthony Ervin's CHASING WATER stands out among sports bios because of its raw honesty and clear voice. The crash-and-burn of a beloved athlete is a familiar story in our sports-obsessed world. But it is Anthony's (Tony's) voice in this memoir that creates the friction and the heartache.

A gifted natural in the water, Anthony portrays himself as an uncomfortable creature on land. He showed such early promise in swimming that other aspects of his life devolved. His family supported his quest for individuality, but not at the sacrifice of discipline. Anthony proved a hard act to balance as his adventures outside of home grew wilder, darker, more dangerous.

The man who won Olympic gold in Australia (50 meter freestyle) is not the man who competed at Cal Berkeley. The man who finally earned his degree in English lit is someone whom his roommates did not know ever swam a race. The press delighted in his story of a comeback at the old age of 31 for the London Olympics. Anthony makes it clear that just reaching the age of 30 was a miracle in itself.

The journey from golden boy to homeless couch surfer, from depressed and insular and dangerously addicted to risk, is a story of growth. The growth of the soul and his intellect save Ervin from his darkest thoughts. His "swimmer's body" with superior muscle memory and drive saved him from accidental death. Ervin does not flinch away from the rough, rude truth of drugs, alcohol, sex, and speed that consumed his life for years.

This is not a whiny tale of someone mourning a lack of public applause. This is the truthful story of a young man's fall from grace in the spotlight and of how he found his way back to living life with a purpose other than one confined in a blue rectangle marked off by lanes.

Michelle Keill says

As both a swimmer and someone who battles various mental issues, this book was a great read for me. It got me thinking about how society sees and manages mental health (as a 'problem') and also the links between exercise, discipline and mental health. And also swimming and mental health. There are a lot of us who plough up and down the lanes and are fighting off some formidable demons. Without my time in the pool, I think mine would occasionally get the better of me. Swimming, for me, is better than any medication, and yet only a few of the doctors I've seen - admittedly the top bods - encouraged me to keep doing it. Sadly, it seems easier for them to dish out Prozac.

Really pleased Ervin got his gold. He deserves it. Not least for all his hard work, but for being so candid, and just for keeping on going.

Jack Haywood says

This book was really good to understand Anthony Ervin's childhood to how he became an Olympian. It was put into two perspectives, his perspective, and when he told his story to Markides, a journalist. I would like to recommend this to young adults, like myself.

Angie says

Co-written by Anthony Ervin, an Olympian, and Constantine Markides, a journalist with a swimming background, *Chasing Water* is about what you'd expect from a sports memoir: a remarkable talent is discovered in childhood, the individual is thrust into greatness before he is really ready, falls off the wagon for a (long) while, and later rediscovers a love for what defined him when he was younger. Weaving between Ervin's own thoughts and Markides' outside—yet still personal—perspective, this book gives readers unique insights into Tourette's Syndrome, the day-to-day experiences and expectations of a high-level athlete, plus some forays into drug abuse and depression and anxiety. It's the story of what makes a man, and the army of people who contribute to the making.

Seeing as this is a memoir about an Olympian, I would have liked more time on the sports side of things and much less on Ervin's "rebel" period, but all in all, it's an enjoyable book. And who doesn't love a good Olympics story?

Jamie says

I received this as an Advanced Reader's Copy.

I am a swimmer, and reading about other people's experiences with swimming motivates me and inspires me. But reading about an Olympian, I was hesitant. I had expectations of ego and stereotypical lessons learned. What I experienced was completely different. It was pure gold.

This is the story of Olympian swimmer Anthony Ervin, told in rotating point of view between Anthony himself and Anthony's friend, the narrator. Anthony's life is about so much more than swimming, which is a big reason why this book is so interesting and different than expected. Another reason that I liked it so much, and that other readers will like it even if they aren't acquainted with the sport, is that Ervin and Markides are readers, writers, and thinkers themselves, so the thoughts and ideas they explore run much deeper than the typical athlete experience. Ervin is a pretty fascinating individual, while being completely and unashamedly human, which he's not afraid to reveal through this book.

Really glad I received this book. It's one of the better ARC's that I've received.

Mandar Gokhale says

I always read about how intensively Michael Phelps used to train – getting up at 6am every morning, rigorously doing laps for the whole day, ad infinitum. To me, this book seems to show what would have ended up happening to a more free, creative version of him who would have chafed at the rigid, almost inhuman discipline needed for Olympic swimming.

To be clear, the book is not about Phelps. It is about Anthony Ervin, an American swimmer who won the gold medal in 50m freestyle at the 2000 Sydney Olympics, and sort of faded out immediately thereafter. Not an unusual story – except that he came back, an incredible *twelve* years later to compete at the 2012 London

Olympics, and continued the comeback to win two gold medals in the 2016 Olympics.

The book treats the swimming and time-spent-outside-swimming parts of his life with equal importance. Anthony Ervin (and Constantine Markides, serving as a narrator in between) lay out all the phases of his life journey from childhood, to initial Olympic triumph, to all the time spent down in the dumps, to his eventual comeback. This is done in a dispassionate tone that I really enjoyed.

Note that the book was written before Ervin's two gold medals at the 2016 Olympics, so it doesn't contain an account of those (even though the cover mentions them; must have been printed afterwards).

Ralph Porrazzo says

Vivid, honest and raw. That exactly what you receive from this wonderful work of art. Carefully crafted to give the reader a candid look at Anthony Ervin's life. I may be biased because of my swimming background, but an outsider will truly never understand the mental hell you endure. This book enlightens us and finally says what is needed to be said about finding one's self. Outstanding. My only wish would be for Anthony and Constantine to go back in time and wait one more year to publish this. But heck, I'm waiting for the next book.

Katy says

So happy I picked up this book! It was a very uniquely told sports biography that alternated between a first-person descriptions of events in Anthony Ervin's life (written by Anthony himself) and third-person descriptions (written by Constantine Markides) that bring everything into focus and provide necessary details to understand Anthony's portions. There are some photos scattered throughout the book, and there's even a comic at the end! I loved how art was perfectly married with the technicalities of the sport. I don't necessarily expect a sports biography to have language this enjoyable and beautiful, which made me really enjoy the novel. I feel like the novel makes you care about Anthony as a person; I am so happy he's in a better place in his life now. As a former swimmer, it was cool to get a peek into the life of an Olympian, and the training and the friendships that form between the competitors.

I also had the pleasure of meeting Anthony and Constantine when they came to Ann Arbor for a book signing. The camaraderie between these two friends filled the room as they read one of the funnier passages from the book. They were also very personable and engaging during the book signing, and I'm very lucky to have had a chance to meet them!

Tinjin Chang says

Awesome book by an incredible Olympic champion, coach, artist, human being, and friend. I've degusted over 1,200 library checkouts since the last Olympic Trials and this one easily ranks among the top 10. Highly recommended.

Emily S. says

There's a lot to say about this book, but it seems wrong to say it. Anthony Ervin, no matter how you feel about his personal life, is a sports legend (though the book was published prematurely in regard to his Rio victory).

Chasing Water detailed some things I think would have been better left un-detailed (notice I don't say unmentioned), i.e. certain acts in burlesque shows or things related to drugs. This is definitely an adult book; I think even aspiring (young) swimmers should wait to read. I was disturbed by some things (promiscuity, etc.), but pleasantly surprised by others (chiefly literary references).

This is a two-voice narrative, Ervin's voice being the quieter of the two. This style serves to make the book feel like somewhat of a study versus a story, but in that sense it was...enlightening. I like to talk about the "human experience," and well, this was certainly that!

Stephanie says

Engaging, detailed stories from swimmer Anthony Ervin's life, starting with the discovery of his talent in childhood through young adult trials to his trips to the Olympic games. The narrative alternates between Markides' straightforward journalistic style and Ervin's journal-like recollections; there are frequent references to philosophy, literature, and music as a means to flesh out the experiences of the thoughtful, insightful if sometimes impulsive & reckless Olympian. Ervin's self-reflections + revelations throughout make his story a richly satisfying relief to read; the brash comic appendix illustrated by friend & fellow swimmer/artist Frank Zio is an inspired addition.

Jason says

An absolutely engaging and in depth look at the Mr. Ervin's life. It's ups and downs, it's a warts and all look and the public Olympian and the private man. An exceptional book about an exceptional man!
