



Proud: My Autobiography

Gareth Thomas

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****WINNER British Sports Book Awards SPORTS BOOK OF THE YEAR****

****Shortlisted for the William Hill Sports Book of the Year Award****

Gareth Thomas had it all. He was a national hero, a sporting icon. He was a leader of men, captain of Wales and the British Lions. To him, rugby was an expression of cultural identity, a sacred code. It was no mere ball game. It gave him everything, except the freedom to be himself.

This is the story of a man with a secret that was slowly killing him. Something that might devastate not only his own life but the lives of his wife, family, friends and teammates. The only place where he could find any refuge from the pain and guilt of the lie he was living was on the pitch, playing the sport he loved. But all his success didn't make the strain of hiding who he really was go away. His fear that telling the truth about his sexuality would lose him everything he loved almost sent him over the edge.

The deceit ended when Gareth became the world's most prominent athlete to come out as a gay man. His gesture has strengthened strangers, and given him a fresh perspective. Gareth's inspiring and moving story transcends the world of sport to tell a universal truth about feeling like an outsider, and facing up to who you really are.

Proud: My Autobiography Details

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Andrew says

There are many very good sporting biographies and those I have read recently such as Victoria Pendleton's and Brian Moore's demonstrate that behind excellence in a world that requires a commitment beyond the understanding of the reader and often hidden demons. In Gareth Thomas's story the first chapter sees him debating whether to kill himself after telling his wife about his homosexuality. Through the book we then follow his story from a childhood whilst well loved he clearly has issues around anger which find release in the masculine environment of the rugby world. For readers who love rugby stories this element takes second place to the emotional turmoil that Thomas goes through over the years and most poignant of all is the acceptance that he receives from his teammates when he finally comes out however this did not impact upon my enjoyment of a book by a rugby player whose playing I enjoyed for many years and who presents a moving story of his trouble whilst also bravely acknowledging the impact upon his wife with no self pity. I would certainly recommend for lovers of sport but also as an interesting view on dealing with their sexuality an important issue for many people.

Daniel Ágreda-Sánchez says

Tremendo libro, no solo por lo que cuenta sino por la calidad de lo escrito. Al final, todo se trata de identidades y pertenencias, de representaciones sociales, de construcción del yo y de los otros, del ser o no ser. No solo se trata del relato de vida de una persona atormentada por no aceptar su (homo)sexualidad, presionado por el contexto (¡capitán de la selección de rugby de Gales, el macho alfa de los macho men!), sino de un individuo que está buscando la razón por la cual pertenece a una ciudad, a un club, a un país, a un deporte; la razón por la cual está casado con una mujer, la razón por la cual juega rugby... No hay certezas en el relato de Thomas, pues los hechos (fácilmente verificables vía internet) se nos muestran desde el otro lado, el del protagonista, y eso lo cambia todo: por ejemplo, sabremos que no fue una gesta impecable ganar el Six Nations, sino que fue una pesadilla que se logró te agándose a diario sapos de todos los tamaños.

En todo caso el dolor, el miedo, la empatía, el rechazo y hasta el cuestionamiento a lo que expone Thomas línea tras líneas, con una narración que tiene mucho de la naturaleza del rugby (sin treguas y con mucha técnica, supongo que es mérito del coautor aunque en este del rugby, digamos que los jugadores suelen tener más cerebro y bagaje que en otros deportes) y poco de la pseudo literatura contemporánea. Se notan la especificidad del deporte y la personalidad del biografiado.

"Proud" es un homenaje al rugby, en primer lugar, y es además un libro que toca la fibra íntima de los temores de todos los seres humanos: el rechazo. Habla de la salida del closet de Gareth Thomas pero no se agota en eso. En serio, hay más teoría de la identidad y de la representación aquí que en muchos ensayos sociológicos contemporáneos y postmodernos. Plus una lección de vida y la constante actitud de agradecimiento de Gareth por sus viejos, sus compañeros de juego y hasta por sus enemigos, hacen de este un libro bonito, sencillo, directo e imprescindible si eres rugbier, maniático de los deportes de contacto, fan de Gareth o gay enclosetado sufriendo por salir del hoyo. O todo eso junto. Lectura obligatoria y nada de por encima del hombro, que en su sencillez esta obra es, de lejos, una de las mejores ediciones que se hicieron en el mundo en 2014. Admitamos que en biografías de deportistas, el rugby está años luz por delante del resto de deportes. Y, de paso, que hay formas inteligentes de escribir libros positivos, con mensajes buena vibra y de lectura chill out. Pero eso es arte que solo manejan los expertos.

Andrea Rudge says

This is one of the best (auto)biographies I have read. It is beautifully written by Thomas and Michael Calvin in an easy-to-read, straightforward, no nonsense manner but is also often poetic. The book is brutally honest and frank about his strengths and weaknesses, is emotive but is not mawkish or sentimental. There is a lot of raw emotion here which moved me to tears on more than one occasion, but there is humour too. It is not a "poor me" tale - in fact, he is most often extremely (too) hard on himself and some of his behaviour.

As an autobiography of a rugby player there is obviously a fair amount of rugby talk but, in my opinion, not so much that non rugby fans won't enjoy it too. It is, ultimately, the life story of a previously mixed up, unhappy, very talented sportsman who eventually overcame his extreme fear to come out as gay and be the person he always was inside but felt he couldn't be in public. It is a very touching and moving account of his path to happiness and acceptance but there is something in this book for everyone to think about. I'm so pleased that I have read it.

Shatterlings says

Well, where to start? I am not a rugby fan, I am especially not a Welsh rugby fan but this isn't really about rugby. This is one of the most brutal, honest autobiographies I think I have ever read and it's so moving for that. I didn't actually like Gareth for a lot of this, but he doesn't expect you to and he didn't like himself much. One of the most heartbreaking things I have ever read is the chapter where he talks about letters and conversations he had with other gay people after he came out.

So please don't dismiss this as another sporting autobiography, because it's so much more than that.

Simon says

There's an easy joke to be made here: that it's more surprising that *every* professional rugby player *hasn't* come out than that one has. Your average lock forward spends most of a game with his hands or head between another man's legs or buried under a pile of muddied man meat, while we're told about a tour early in Gareth Thomas's club career on which players rubbed hot sauce into each other's genitals and arse cracks as some kind of initiation. Meanwhile Lawrence Dallaglio is banging on the Wales dressing room door after England had beaten them in the Six Nations screaming that they'd been 'dicked'. And so on and so forth.

But this is, of course, far too serious and personal a story for a joke like that. It would also be unfair on the rugby community, which has been near universally and generously supportive of Thomas since he came out (with the single exception of the crowd at one early game at Castleford). This is also a significant story. At the time of coming out, Thomas was the only openly gay professional athlete in a team sport anywhere in the world. He didn't come out in order to become a role model - he was at such a desperately low ebb that he came out in order to save his own life - but there's no doubt that his actions have changed the lives of others. One of the chapters in the book is devoted to a selection of the stories that hundreds of people, of all ages, from all around the world, have written to share with him.

But this also strikes me as the contradiction – this is both the most incredible story and the most ordinary. Heartbreakingly, Thomas’s wife had three miscarriages and, inevitably, he convinced himself that that was some kind of divine punishment for his double life. He tells us that he’s convinced that if he had had children that he would never have come out. But just like being gay is only one of the things that defines who you are, so is being a parent, so I’m not so sure. And presumably this isn’t the first time in history that mismatched sexuality has interrupted a marriage. His status and profile as an athlete obviously made this all visible, but this is just what happens in lives.

This is a brilliant sports biography, brilliantly (ghost) written. It clearly has that redemptive narrative arc that’s so compelling, and like all the best sport books it uses sport to say something much more important about life and society. It’s also got plenty to interest the keen rugby fan (on leadership in the dressing room, for example, and Woodward’s disastrous Lion’s tour). It’s just a shame that we’re not yet at that point where ‘man comes out’ is no story at all.

Sally says

So many parts of this book made me cry. Worth a read even if you are not a rugby fan - though I am so the rugby parts were especially interesting!

Jonathan says

Anybody who knows me will know that I do not often read sports biographies. Gareth Thomas's autobiography is moving and heartfelt, well written and appealing both to rugby fans and those interested in coming out stories that have affected the way the world perceives gay men. There are dark times right from the word go, and reading Gareth's story it is no wonder that so many professional sports people find it so difficult to make that decision to let the world know about their true selves.

I saw a programme about 18 months before reading his book where Gareth Thomas discussed his life, his career and coming out, and he struck me as a man who was still not entirely comfortable in his skin. Reading this book made me happy to think that his journey has improved, and that hopefully his future will get even better. This is a great book for any young person, gay or straight, who wants to know the kind of pressures a professional sports career can put on you, and also that being honest and upfront about your feelings is, in the long run, the best way to go.

Shahiron Sahari says

Brave.

Craig says

An incredibly powerful and emotional read. Gareth Thomas's journey to the pinnacle of his sport and coming

to terms with his sexuality. Unexpected poetic, devastatingly honest and very moving. A sad reflection on the homophobia in sport and the world but encouraging in how things are changing but a powerful reminder about how living your life honestly is the best way to change hearts and minds. Even better read if you like Rugby!

Mary Geraghty says

A beautifully crafted book

Have always loved rugby, can absolutely see the issues you went through. What a world we live in. Loved your book, wish you did not have to write it. Blessings to you and Ian, glad you found your happiness. ?

Gavin Shiers says

This book was a heartbreaking read and very enjoyable. I am also a man who went through many of the things that Gareth went through. But as he has and many more will I have come through it and am happy. One thing I love and am proud to say is that none of my friends or family turned against me. This I have to say Thank you x

CrabbyPatty says

This is Gareth Thomas:

and this is Gareth Thomas: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFTUT...>

It has been said of rugby: "If there is no blood on the line, it is not rugby league." Gareth Thomas was 6'3" of fiercely competitive muscle and sinew, utterly confident in his ability to play the aggressive full-contact sport (played with little or no padding). As a captain, he led by example and backbreaking hard work. He was a national hero, becoming the first Welshman to win 100 caps in rugby union play. On the rugby pitch, he was the master of his destiny.

But off the field, Gareth Thomas was almost brought to suicide by trying to keep his sexuality a secret. He feared rejection from everything he had known, but knew that unless he came out, he would eventually die.

His autobiography is honest and raw in all aspects of his life and is particularly devastating regarding his love for his wife Jemma, their 3 heartbreaking miscarriages, and the eventual realization that although he loved her with 99% of his being, it was not enough for either of them.

I listened to the audiobook, beautifully and soulfully narrated by the Welsh actor Matthew Gravelle.

Gary Willmott says

A truly superb book - incredibly well written and truly inspiring.

I was always a fan of Gareth Thomas - even though he played for the wrong team (not a euphemism...) - a true giant among rugby men. When he came out as gay when he was still in the rugby environment, my estimation of him increased even more.

I read this in three sittings and I have never been so moved, inspired or engaged by a sports autobiography - possibly any book in fact - as much as I have by this one.

Five stars no problem and a book that I will re-read, or at least dip into again, for sure.

Matt says

I've been wanting to read it for sometime. I brought it while I was down visiting family in South Wales. I just had to get it from the bookshop. This was a superb book to read. I was only going to read a few pages this evening, but that didn't happen. once I finished a chapter, I had to start the next one and so on. My eyes were glued to the pages from the first page.

Sophie says

This is probably one of the most honest autobiographies I've read. He seems to give so much of himself in the telling of it and I find myself coming away with a lot of respect for the man. I particularly enjoyed the chapter which shared the stories and letters of people who reached out to him after he came out publicly. He speaks a lot of the support and encouragement provided by his teammates in rugby and sections like the letter ones felt like he was imparting that to these people, and by extension any lgbt+ readers who are also struggling. A more coherent and in depth review will follow on YouTube at some point, but suffice to say this was an autobiography that will stay with me in many ways.
