

Retallack, Joan. *Poethical Wager*. U of California P, 2003.

Scalapino, Leslie. *The Public World/Syntactically Impermanence*. Hanover: Wesleyan UP, 1999.

Paulina Ambroży  
Adam Mickiewicz University

**Łukasz Muniowski. *Three-Pointer! A 40-Year NBA History*. McFarland, 2020, 208 pages.**

In early 2021, an NBA fan, who not only watches the games but also follows the news and reports on the developments in the greatest basketball league in the world, could come across headlines such as: “Golden State Warriors: Kelly Oubre is the worst 3-point shooter in the NBA”<sup>1</sup> or “The Utah Jazz just had the best 3-point shooting month in NBA history.”<sup>2</sup> Basketball’s beat writers’ focus on this single aspect of players’ and teams’ basketball arsenal may seem obvious as the NBA is in the midst of the Golden Age of 3-point shooting. However, it has not always been so. It has taken the NBA decades to not only incorporate the 3-point shot but to actually utilize it in a manner the shot was meant to be—a *spectacular* and *tactically efficient* play. Muniowski’s *Three-Pointer! A 40-Year NBA History* is a fascinating story of the evolution of the 3-point shot and the league where the shot is best utilized. The book is also much more.

Muniowski’s book is a work of passion harnessed in intellectual approach and academic rigor which makes *Three-Pointer!* a not-for-everybody book, which is by no means criticism of the book. Muniowski’s historical novel with limited dialogues, while filled with interesting narratives which include players’s biographies and even anecdotes, may overwhelm some readers with abundance of statistical data and names of: players, coaches and executives; however, it is only a testament to author’s meticulousness and broad knowledge of the subject matter. In his book, Muniowski blends the technical with the poetic when providing statistics and analysis on the mechanics of the 3-pointer or explaining why shooting percentage is a factor; he also paints narratives of rich and eventful life stories of the book’s (numerous) protagonists, which provides the humanistic element to the analytical work.

Each of the chapters begins with a player (or a play) that contributed to the increase in importance of the 3-point shot and places the said player (or the play) in clearly outlined context, which results in each chapter having a distinct theme which reveals itself in the stories told by the author.

The Introduction, apart from the usual outline of the book, offers detailed explanation of what a 3-point is and how its introduction kick started the evolution of the game of basketball (mainly in the NBA, although other professional and semi-professional American basketball (mainly in the NBA, although other professional and semi-professional leagues, teams, and players are mentioned). Muniowski paints a

1 [https://hoopshabit.com/2021/01/27/golden-state-warriors-kelly-oubre-3-point/?utm\\_source=flipboard&utm\\_medium=referral&utm\\_campaign=flipboard](https://hoopshabit.com/2021/01/27/golden-state-warriors-kelly-oubre-3-point/?utm_source=flipboard&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=flipboard)

2 <https://www.deseret.com/sports/2021/2/1/22260626/the-utah-jazz-just-had-the-best-3-point-shooting-month-in-nba-history>

historical background to how the 3-point line came into being and how it found its way into the NBA. The author also clearly defines what it takes and means to be a shooter in the game of basketball.

One way in which the Introduction foreshadows the content of the following chapters is by revealing an intricate network of connections between the players, coaches, and executives whom the book is, in fact, about. For example, the reader of *Three-Pointer!* will learn Steph Curry (Chapter X), who is a son of a great 3-point shooter, Dell Curry and is coached by a 1997 3-Point Contest winner, Steve Kerr (Chapter VII) will, by the time he retires as the greatest 3-point shooter in NBA's history, overtake Ray Allen (Chapter IX), who still holds the record for most 3-pointers made and was one of the first members of Jordan (Chapter IV) Brand, played on a team coached by Chris Ford (Chapter I), who made NBA's first ever 3-point shot. While the connections drawn by Muniowski may sometimes seem forced and repetitive in the way the same names reappear throughout the text, the fact is that Muniowski reveals a certain, important truth about the NBA—it truly is the greatest league in the world as its players are an elite group of individuals selected from the best of the best. And, while many of them did not earn their place in the Basketball Hall of Fame, they were the unsung heroes of the evolution of the game and *Three-Pointer!* is a fitting tribute to their contributions.

The theme of Chapter I—"October 12, 1979: Chris Ford Makes the First Three-Pointer in League History"—is "It's a sport alright, but it's a spectator sport." In the chapter, Muniowski analyzes the impact different individuals had on the collegiate and professional basketball leagues in 1950s and 60s, among whom most prominent were George Mikan, who introduced the 3-point shot to the ABA; Howard A. Hobson—a basketball coach and theoretician, who was among the first to encourage players to adopt two-handed, long-distance shooting; Abe Saperstein, who gained fame as the manager of Harlem Globetrotters and introduced the 3-point line to the ABL in 1961; and Chris Ford, who shot the first recorded 3-pointer in the NBA.

In this chapter, Muniowski presents the long and uneasy way the 3-point shot had to go before it made it to the NBA in 1979. As one of many rule changes that have been introduced to the game of basketball, the introduction of 3-point line was the result of purely sports and marketing reasons. For example, the "goaltending" rule made the game fairer, and the "24-second clock" made it faster and more exciting. Analogically, Hobson advocated long-distance shots from tactical perspective, Saperstein saw the play as a marketing tool, which would attract more spectators. When the NBA adopted the 3-point line in 1979, it was, in fact, part of the league's strategy to restore its positive image and improve ratings. From the beginning the rules introduced to the game were of marketing value as their idea was to make basketball more of a spectator sport and make it more "exciting" to the audiences (and players as well). It seems that the philosophy of "faster, better, cheaper" introduced by NASA in 1990s had been employed by basketball managers already in the sixties. The chapter also features stories about the contributions of: Forrest Allen, Bill Sharman, Dennis Murphy, and Louie Dampier.

In Chapter II, "February 6, 1988: Larry Bird Reclaims the Title of the Three-Point King," Muniowski presents the first superstar who embraced the 3-point shot.

The player was Larry Bird, who was a phenomenal player and a superstar first, and a great 3-point shooter second. The detailed description of Bird's persona and accomplishments confirm author's claim that in order to be a great shooter, one needs to have confidence in their shot, and no one was more confident in their shooting abilities than Larry Bird. The chapter about "Larry Legend" illustrates how sports legends come into being as a result of accomplishments and narratives surrounding them. Bird's 3-pointers work as narratives as their significance was not only from a competition standpoint (buzzer beaters!), but also because they were preceded by trash-talking which makes for great sports literature.

Bird's triumphs in the 3-Point Contest also signify the change of basketball culture in 1980s influenced by the growing impact of media and business. The first All-Star Game in 1951 was a marketing tool, so was the introduction of the three-point line in 1979, and so was the expansion of the All-Star Game into an All-Star Weekend featuring various events, most marketable of which have been the Slam Dunk Contest and the 3-Point Contest, in which Bird dominated. Not surprisingly, each of the highly mediated events during the All-Star Weekend is one featuring offensive basketball plays—no defense or hard-fought wins, as Walt Frazier complained, only the show and the spectacle. The chapter also features stories about the contributions of: Bill Laimbeer, Craig Ehlo, Craig Hodges, Dale Ellis, and Danny Ainge.

Chapter III—"March 23, 1991: Michael Adams Scores 54 Points with Particularly Ugly Shots"—epitomizes the main theme of the whole book: "Basketball is a team sport." Each sport has its stars and superstars, who are promoted by their leagues in order to sell tickets and make broadcast deals. It may be argued that no league has been more efficient in promoting its stars than the NBA—Kareem, Larry, Magic, MJ, Kobe, LeBron—no last names necessary. The media exposure of these "gods of basketball" ever since the "Geo Mikan vs. Knicks" marketing scheme (Chapter I) has resulted in a misapprehension that they were able to carry their teams on their shoulders and win championships by themselves. Obviously, this is not the case; in the long run of the NBA season followed by the Play-offs, any team's success depends on a number of factors, of which the role players' contributions may be the most significant one. By highlighting the career of Michael Adams, Muniowski demonstrates not only how 3-pointer helped players, who otherwise would have never made it to the NBA, flourish or at least contribute, but also glorifies basketball for what it is—a team sport. The chapter also features stories about the contributions of: Isiah Thomas (the other one), Terrell Brandon, Calvin Murphy, Bob Moe, 1980s Denver Nuggets, Shawn Marion, Matt Bonner, Derek Fisher, and Chris Jackson/Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf.

The theme of Chapter IV—"June 3, 1992: Michael Jordan Shrugs His Way to Another Memorable Performance"—is "The beauty of sports lies in its unpredictability." Whenever one goes to YouTube to search for greatest: plays, moments, or performances in the history of the NBA, one will almost certainly come across the clip of Michael Jordan shrugging his arms after making his sixth 3-pointer of the first half of Game 1 of 1992 NBA Finals. While "The Shrug" has been interpreted in various ways (including as display of arrogance and Jordan's way of saying "Well, I am the greatest"), the prevalent interpretation is that of Jordan's own surprise with



what he had just achieved. This interpretation is supported by the fact that Jordan's performance in the said game was unpredictable—Jordan had never been known for his outside shooting and yet, when it was necessary or challenged, he utilized the 3-point shot which made him a complete player. In the chapter, Muniowski demonstrates how the fact that NBA's biggest star embraced the 3-point shot validated the play, illustrates the importance of the competitive drive in the athlete's career, and provides examples of how unpredictable moments in NBA's history (Sam Bowie chosen over Jordan on 1984 NBA Draft, John Paxon's 3-pointer in Game 6 of 1993 Finals) make for some of its best narratives. The chapter also features stories about the contributions of: John Paxon, Dan Majerle, Danny Ainge, Clyde Drexler, and Scottie Pippen.

While Chapter V—"May 7, 1995: Reggie Miller Scores Eight Points in Nine Seconds Against the Knicks"—provides fascinating sports narratives of the first true 3-point expert in Reggie Miller, the thrill of clutch plays and how "game recognizes game," the actual theme of the chapter is "Conflict." In Muniowski's account of the history of Indiana basketball, conflict has many faces. The story of Reggie Miller vs. the New York Knicks presents conflict between opposing teams as a reflection of tribal mentality of the fans of rivaling cities, which is an integral part of spectator sport and shows how despite the conflict, there is a place for displays of respect towards the foe. Muniowski himself pays due respect to Cheryl Miller (Reggie's sister), who was one of the reasons why WNBA came into being. However, the chapter also displays the darker side of conflict. The stories of Bobby Knight and Steve Alford reveal how deeply rooted racial division is in certain parts of the USA. The chapter also features stories about the contributions of: Steve Alford, Bobby Knight, Chuck Person, Scott Skiles, Cheryl Miller, Larry Brown, John Starks, and Mark Jackson.

By introducing the story of George McCloud in Chapter VI, "April 19, 1996: George McCloud Goes from Draft Bust to NBA Record Holder," Muniowski, on the one hand offers the theme of "from zero to hero" and the NBA's version of the American Dream. The McCloud narrative is probably the most dramatic one as it portrays the player's career and private life, which was marked by personal tragedies, reveal the triumph of the spirit, which was possible in large part due to chance when McCloud got his chance to shine only after another player was injured. On the other hand, Muniowski (again) demonstrates the marketing forces behind rule changes in the NBA (shortening the 3-point line distance) and how the change allowed certain players to leave their mark on the league's history (Majerle). The author also describes how celebrity journalism came into being and provides a nice throwback to the pop-culture of the 1990s. The chapter also features stories about the contributions of: Pat Riley, Dan Majerle, Detlef Schrempf, Steve Kerr, Dick Motta, 1990s Dallas Mavericks, Jason Kidd, and Dennis Scott.

The theme of Chapter VII, "February 8–9, 1997: Steve Kerr and Glen Rice Dominate the All-Star Weekend," is "NBA's alternate reality," in which a blue-eyed, blonde Steve Kerr, instead of enjoying the "white privilege," is an underdog and Glen Rice's athletic body is not seen as "threatening, black male one" but makes him a star. Both gentlemen were also gifted 3-point shooters. Muniowski also touches on the topic of the relativity of time. While Rice enjoyed his 15 minutes of fame in 1997 when his performance overshadowed Michael Jordan himself, who in the same All-Star Game

recorded the first triple-double in the game's history (Rice also had quite an impressive career in Charlotte—the team later owned by Jordan), Kerr will go down in history as possibly the central figure of the 3-point revolution due to his own 3-point shooting (a 3-Point Contest winner in 1997 and the most efficient shooter in NBA's history in terms of percent of the shots made) but also as the coach of the two most phenomenal 3-point shooters of the modern era (and possibly the league's history). The chapter also features stories about the contributions of: Mark Price, Tim Legler, Phil Jackson, Steph Curry, Michael Jordan, Klay Thompson, and Latrell Sprewell.

In Chapter VIII, "May 26, 2002 Robert 'Big Shot Rob' Horry Strikes Again," Muniowski pays tribute to role players, of whom, according to the author, Robert Horry was the best one. Muniowski's claim was supported by Horry himself in February 2021, when (quite humorously) the seven-time NBA champion congratulated Tom Brady winning his seventh Super Bowl; Horry's praise of Brady came in a Tweet which used the "Spider-Man Pointing at Spider-Man" meme with both athletes' faces and their trophies photoshopped in, and featured the exclamation "Congratulations @TomBrady Welcome to the 7 Chip Club."<sup>3</sup> The fact that Horry won more championships than Michael Jordan is impressive; what is more impressive that those championships were, in some part, the result of Horry's clutch moments 3-pointers, which cemented the long distance shot's place as the strategic weapon in basketball and the narrative climax of great basketball stories. The chapter also features stories about the contributions of: Jeff Hornacek, Eddie Johnson, Matt Maloney, Brent Price, Kenny Smith, and 2002 Los Angeles Lakers and Sacramento Kings.

In Chapter IX, "February 18, 2006: Dirk Nowitzki Becomes the Tallest Three-Point Contest Winner Ever," Muniowski focuses on the theme of "NBA redefined." In the center of the chapter, the author places Dirk Nowitzki, who embodies two aspects of the sports and cultural change that took place in the NBA in 1990s and 2000s. One, Nowitzki is presented as one of the pioneering "big men" who played outside the 3-point line, and one of the most accomplished power-forwards who did not play in the paint. Two, Nowitzki, while not first in the long line of foreigners, who made it to the NBA, is considered possibly the greatest European player in the league's history. Muniowski uses Nowitzki's accomplishments to demonstrate how the 3-pointer evolved from a "circus shot" into every player's a must-have component of the offensive arsenal. The chapter also features stories about the contributions of: Kevin Love, Bob McAdoo, Holger Geschwindner, Michael Finley, Don Nelson, 1990s Golden State Warriors, Peja Stojakovic, Šarūnas Marčiulionis, Arvydas Sabonis, Drazen Petrovic, Detlef Schrempf, Sam Perkins, Steve Nash, and Mark Cuban.

The theme of Chapter X, "June 18, 2013: Ray Allen Makes the Most Famous Shot of His Career," is "Practice, practice, practice." In this most technical of all the chapters in the book, Muniowski presents an array of 3-point specialist that have emerged in the last decade of NBA's history, and how their preparation during practices translated into spectacular performances during games. The author also gives credit to coaches who either contributed to the evolution of the game of basketball by, for example, introducing small, shooting line-up (Spoelstra) or successfully adapted to the changing game, despite their personal dislike of the 3-point shot itself (Popovich).

3 <https://twitter.com/RKHorry/status/1358788700545536002>

In narrative terms, Muniowski take on Allen's career reveals the truthfulness of the sports saying that "Only the last shots/goals/fights/races/ are remembered by the fans." The chapter also features stories about the contributions of: Gregg Popovich, Eric Spoelstra, 2013 Miami Heat, Rashard Lewis, Donyell Marshall, Kobe Bryant, Chris Ford, and 2008 Boston Celtics.

The theme of Chapter XI, "March 8, 2015: Steph Curry Proves That He Can Score from Anywhere on the Court," is "The step-back-three is the new dunk."<sup>4</sup> In the concluding chapter of his book, Muniowski portrays the present-day NBA where, after a decades long journey of changes in rules, mentalities, circumstances and technologies, the long-distance shot found its way into the hands of the greatest 3-point shooter ever—Stephen Curry. While Curry is an exceptional player in his own rights, he, together with his teammate, Klay Thompson, and their coach, Steve Kerr symbolize the strategic importance and the spectacular appeal of the 3-pointer in contemporary NBA. While the dunk still remains the most certain way of scoring points in basketball, Curry, and many before him made the three, the most devastating basketball maneuver. The chapter also features stories about the contributions of: Steve Kerr, Dell Curry, Kyle Korver, Klay Thompson, James Harden, and Daryl Morey.

Muniowski's *Three-Pointer!: A 40-Year NBA History* is many things. First and foremost, it is a thorough and detailed analysis of why basketball is played in modern NBA the way it is, and the impact of the 3-point shot has had on the sport's evolution. It is a fascinating historical account of the journey of a sports discipline of a global appeal since its conception in an YMCA gym in Springfield, Massachusetts. The book is also a narrative of unsung heroes, whom the history has either forgotten or may soon forget, and whose stories deserve to be told and their contributions should be remembered and acknowledged. There are the narratives of stars and legends in the book as well; nevertheless, in Muniowski's book, the Jordans and the Birds of the NBA this one time give the floor to the league's McClouds and Ellises. Apart from the stories of people, Muniowski paints a vivid landscape of dependencies, which have shaped the NBA over the years. The reader will find in this book the clashes of generations, the perennial tensions between conservatives and progressives, as well as the racial tensions which even the predominantly African American league has not escaped, the role of media and the factor of viewership as well as the tyranny of the dollar affecting the way the sport is played. Through the prism of the 3-point shot, Muniowski tells a story which exceeds the narratives of a sport and its athletes, it is a story of complex forces shaping the spectacle enjoyed by millions all over the world. The book is a compulsory reading for an avid fan and an academic studying the crossroads of sports, media, and business with politics, culture, race and even religion in the background.

Tomasz Jacheć  
University of Warmia and Mazury

---

4 Fragment of Jamie Foxx's narration in a 2015 Under Armour TV commercial starring Steph Curry.