

Block Party

Life On The Edge, Book Down The Middle

Due in all bookstores nationwide tomorrow, Bob Probert's personal and professional odyssey are reshaped yet again. This time in his own words.

Tough Guy: My Life on the Edge is Probert's attempt to set his life's record straight. What we get is Probert's cookie-cutter version of history. The stories are there. He's not hiding from the facts, but there is very little depth. He jumps from story to story; incident to incident, shrugging his broad shoulders in a "so what?" cadence.

Probert concedes his faults. Yet, he also continuously complains his treatment is unfair or too harsh.

To a certain extent it is difficult to judge this book definitively considering Probert passed away before finishing the project. Hard at work on it just a few days before his passing, Probert's wife Dani gave co-author Kirstie McLellan-Day the green light to finish the book as Dani writes in her brief foreword "to see his dream fulfilled."

The book begins with an exceptional chapter penned by McLellan-Day chronicling Probert's final day almost minute by minute in heartbreaking detail. It's the only point of Probert's story in that you feel any sense of connection to him. She is able to depict the soft, kind, heroic family man Probert himself never comes close to capturing. At the core, he's a loving father who wants to be the best dad he can possibly be. Unfortunately this book, much like Probert's Chicago stay, hits its peak early and checks out long past its best moments. The opening pages of the book are also among the few you truly get to know his wife and children.

Kirstie McLellan-Day also served as co-author for Theo Fleury's 2009 tell-all *Playing With Fire*. It was Fleury who introduced Probert to McLellan Day after Probert felt an urge.

With his kids growing into their teens, they'd become increasingly aware and curious of their father's past. Probert knew he couldn't shelter his children from their father's toxic history any longer.

"That's why I am writing my own book – to tell it my way before someone else screws it up," Probert explains in the book.

The result is a mixed bag. If you are a long time fan or someone who knows Probert's history, the book comes and goes in 253 pages without giving the reader any real insight into the man. He does offer a few amazing revelations however.

A non-hockey or a new fan will likely be astonished by the book's honesty. Probert acknowledges every major incident, each confrontation with law enforcement and U.S./Canadian border officials. Probert played hard and lived harder. He offers very few apologies in regards to either.

Fans of Bob Probert will be satisfied. From junior hockey to Adirondack to Detroit, Chicago and points in between, Probert details many of his on-ice wars. In almost every case he emerges in victory. While he makes note of instances when Troy Crowder and Tie Domi get the better of him, in the end, the heavyweight champ of the ice makes sure you know he got his revenge.

Probert speaks glowingly of his time in Chicago with the notable exceptions of Bob Murray, Dirk Graham and Sun-Times columnist Rick Telander. In the book, Probert mentions an interview he agreed to meet Telander at a bar in Chicago just after Gary Bettman reinstated Probert post-substance abuse treatment in 1995. Telander ordered a shot of alcohol and had the waitress place it between the two during their talk. Probert also alleges Telander pulled out a rolled up twenty dollar bill (insinuating it contained cocaine) and told Probert "Snort Away."

Perhaps an example of the book's incompleteness is the omission of any reference to either time the Blackhawks paid tribute to Probert's career. Neither occasion, the "Heritage Night" in February of 2009 nor the forgotten "Bob Probert Tribute Night" in January of 2004 are mentioned. Yet, his participation in CBC's Battle of the Blades reality TV competition in April of 2009 is covered.

The compassionate mentoring of the Blackhawks' family in Probert's transition from Detroit to Chicago is somewhat shattered in Probert's depiction of

the events leading to his indefinite suspension from the NHL in 1994. Days after the drunken motorcycle wreck that nearly ended his life and effectively ended his days with the Red Wings, Probert arrived in Bill Wirtz's office for a final contract negotiation. Wirtz and Bob Pulford were smoking cigars and enjoying a cocktail as they greeted NHL's damaged bad boy.

He writes glowingly of Bob Pulford, who was a kindred spirit of sorts and maintained regular contact with Probert even in retirement.

With each passing chapter I found myself less interested in Probert. He speaks of his family, but they're never a focal point. His wife of seventeen years (he died four days after their anniversary), Dani, is the most fascinating character in the book, yet we never truly meet her. We know she's hot. That, Probert mentions many times. When the book concludes I'm left wondering what her side to this story is. Why did she stick around after her husband's many betrayals and unfulfilled promises to get straight for his kids?

Bob Probert leaves behind four children. Three daughters and a son. The last two, twins, Declyn and Jack, named after his grandfather. Bob was too busy relapsing in Las Vegas doing coke and getting a room with a stripper to make it home for the twins' birthday. On the day his career effectively ended, Dani received news of her grandmother's passing. Instead of going home to support his wife, Probert got loaded and missed the funeral services all together.

His depiction of his marriage is at times puzzling. Probert admits to have been a "horny bastard" and that his wife would know always know if he'd been messing around. "After I retired, it became almost like a game," Probert writes.

Like many of the anecdotes Probert drops in the narrative, you're left wondering how much more there is to the story. If he was willing to share that much about their marriage, how much is being left out?

If the point of this book was to give an accurate account of his stormy off-ice trials and tribulations for his family's sake, why go to the point to telling your kids daddy cheats on mommy but it's 'okay' she's cool with it? What is that suppose to accomplish?

The closest comparison I can draw would be that of professional wrestler "Nature Boy" Ric Flair. In Flair's auto-biography *To Be The Man*, Flair was a little-too liberal with his accounts of the party life on the road. After 22 years of marriage, seeing these things in print and in the public record was too much for Flair's wife Beth. She felt humiliated and filed for divorce.

For all Probert's honesty, the book contains too much bravado and not enough heart. We know of his abilities on the ice and his trouble away from the rink, but he doesn't offer much more than what we already knew. He dismisses the idea his father's stroke, deteriorating health and death days before he left for his rookie junior season in Brantford as a reason for his troubles substance abuse. He also, though, doesn't delve much into his relationship with his mother and father.

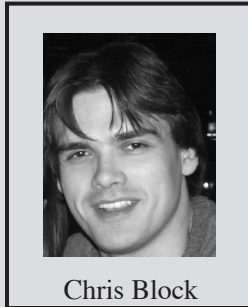
And yeah, those stories of Probert being clean and sober his entire stay as a player in Chicago? He clears those up in the book. During the 2001-02 season Probert admits to boozing, drugging and getting away with it as he always kept clean urine in the house for when the mandatory drug test would come up. Before then, Probert claims to have tasted "nothing stronger than an O'Doul's."

Had he focused more on his relationship with Dani, the reader may have had a chance to learn something new about his life. Or, maybe we would have gotten answers to questions we don't already know.

He mentions many times that Dani never tried to change him. Why?

This book is a good refresher course in Probert history and a nice keepsake for any Bob Probert fan. But don't expect much more than that. It raises just as many questions as it has answers. Again, Probie leaves us wanting more.

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