

7101 Hwy 71W#200
Austin, Texas 78735
512.288.8555
www.readerviews.com
admin@readerviews.com

My Dirty Little Secrets – Steroids, Alcohol and God: The Tony Mandarich Story
Tony Mandarich and Sharon Shaw Elrod
Modern History Press (2009)
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Reviewed by Olivera Jackson-Baumgartner (9/08)

Tony Mandarich's book "My Dirty Little Secrets – Steroids, Alcohol and God" is heartbreaking and heartwarming at the same time. The reader gets to follow Tony through the best and the worst of college football and his NFL career, as well as his "career" as husband and a father. Everything that readers love is there: humble beginnings, working-class parents, older brother to look up to, promising start to a brilliant career, dedication and hard work, grueling workouts, drugs, invitation to NFL and... a big crash. What follows this first, promise-filled part is heart-wrenching. Tony's descent into the addiction hell is surprising on one hand and all too understandable on the other. Readers can't help but be astonished that somebody, who on one hand has trained so hard and turned his body into such a temple to strength, can so viciously destroy it with drugs and alcohol on the other hand. We have to give it to Mr. Mandarich – he is nothing but brutally candid and honest, and he never blames anybody else for his troubles, not even in the cases where some blame could have been shared, if not clearly laid on others. Tony Mandarich's shoulders are wide, and he bravely decided to take the full load of guilt on himself.

Even if you are not a sports fan, I am convinced that you will find Tony Mandarich's account of his two NFL careers fascinating. The crystal clear difference in his attitude during his days with the Green Bay Packers and sharply contrasting days with the Indianapolis Colts is elucidating. What a difference an attitude adjustment can – and does! – make. This should be required reading for anybody in the public eye, but most importantly for many athletes who have trouble understanding that they are responsible for their actions on and off the athletic fields. As illuminating as I found the chapters of Tony Mandarich's years on the football field, they pale in comparison with his insight into his own addiction and his path to recovery and healing, both his own and healing of those around him. Some of my favorite pages are those where he describes his newly rediscovered joy of playing football, and playing it well. And the romantic in me rejoiced when Tony met and reconnected with his college sweetheart, Char. By the looks of it, Tony really learned his hard lessons, and both his second NFL career and his second marriage, to Char, were – and are – so much more successful than either of his first attempts.

Brutally honest at times, and always straightforward, Tony Mandarich's "My Dirty Little Secrets" is in my opinion first and foremost a great book about the power we all hold within ourselves and everything we can achieve if we only decide to do the right thing. Unfailingly optimistic, but never preachy, this book should find a wide audience of those who are curious enough to reserve judgment until they learn all of the facts. I am not qualified to say how good of a football player Tony Mandarich ever was, but he is certainly a brave man and one who can walk with his head held high anywhere in this world.