

# Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For More Information Contact:  
Melanie DeNardo  
646-307-5239  
[melanie.denardo@hholt.com](mailto:melanie.denardo@hholt.com)

## An All-American Story about the Power of Community, Love, and Hard Work

# OUR BOYS

### *A Perfect Season on the Plains with the Smith Center Redmen*

“None of this is really about football . . . what I hope we’re doing is sending kids into life who know that every day means something.” —Coach Roger Barta

“The tale [Drape] spins ends up being one that transcends athletics, a story of adolescence and smalltown life . . . From the opening practice to the Redmen’s final game, Drape flawlessly paints a picture of how Smith Center achieves perfection year after year . . . Drape gives the reader a team worth rooting for.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“A feel-good story of youthful drive, great coaching and the value of unflagging communal support.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

In a news world populated by stories of our country’s fragmentation and misfortune, it’s time to highlight an incredibly uplifting and truly American story.

Imagine, if you will, *Friday Night Lights* with the best possible ending, and it’s not just about high-school football but about one very American town that has figured out how to raise its boys to be outstanding people. That book is **OUR BOYS: A Perfect Season on the Plains with the Smith Center Redmen (Times Books/August 18, 2009)** by the award-winning *New York Times* sportswriter Joe Drape.

Initially, Drape wrote a front-page article in the fall of 2007 about the amazing winning streak of the high-school football team in Smith Center, Kansas—population 1,931—and the story sparked a flurry of reader interest. Soon after, Drape, a Kansas City native, decided to move his family to Smith Center for an immersion in the Redmen way of life. **OUR BOYS** is the story of the 2008 season as Drape brings to life the coaches, players, and parents—an entire community—fighting to hold on to a way of life that is rich in value, even as their town’s economic fortunes decline. Hours removed from the nearest city, Smith Center revolves around “our boys” in a way that goes to the core of what America’s heartland is today.

The Redmen had finished their previous season with 54 straight games won and had outscored their opponents 704–0. The seniors who graduated that May had not lost a game in their four years of high school. They had done so by embracing a philosophy of life taught by their legendary coach, Roger Barta: “Respect each other, then learn to love each other, and together we are champions.” But as the Redmen embarked on a quest for a fifth consecutive title in the fall of 2008, they faced a potentially destabilizing transition: that senior class had graduated, and Barta was contemplating retirement after three decades on the sidelines. In Smith Center this changing of the guard was seismic.

**OUR BOYS** is a moving portrait of Coach Barta, his dedicated staff, the impressive young men of Smith Center, and the entire community that has banded together to support and raise their children (and not just those kids on the football field). So much more than a sports tale of winning or losing, this book is sure to take its place among the most memorable **American** stories of recent years.

###

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**JOE DRAPE** is a reporter for The New York Times and the author of *The Race for the Triple Crown* and *Black Maestro*. A graduate of Southern Methodist University, he previously worked for The Dallas Morning News and The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. When he doesn't live in Kansas, he lives in New York City with his wife and son.

#### **OUR BOYS: A Perfect Season on the Plains with the Smith Center Redmen**

by Joe Drape

Times Books/Henry Holt and Company

On sale: August 18, 2009 / ISBN: 978-0-8050-8890-8 / \$25.00

[www.henryholt.com](http://www.henryholt.com)

[www.joedrape.com](http://www.joedrape.com)

---

#### **Snapshots of the Redmen While on the Road to the 2008 State Championship**

**Roger Barta, head coach:** Over the course of 31 years, Coach Barta has won 289 games against 58 losses and 8 state championships. He is shaped like Buddha and speaks in the soft whisper of a monk. By the end of the 2008 season, he had led the Redmen to 67 straight victories, the nation's longest current winning streak. Still, he is considering retirement.

**Marshall McCall**, senior running back and team captain: He's as all-American as Opie with straight A's and a penchant for worrying: about keeping together a senior class that has never really won anything, about keeping the streak alive, and about whether he can earn a scholarship to play football in college. When Marshall suffers a concussion in the first series of the opening game, the whole season is put in jeopardy.

**Justin Nixon**, senior lineman: Justin is 6 feet tall and 350 pounds; his calves measure 22 inches, his biceps 21, and his thighs 31. Justin captured the state weightlifting championship and set a record by squatting 605 pounds and benching 460 pounds. Kansas State is recruiting him, but wonders if he is perhaps too gentle a soul to play big-time football. Justin, however, simply wants to be the first Nixon in five generations to attend college.

**Colt Rogers**, junior running back: Colt is barely 5 foot 3 and 135 pounds, but he is the Redmen's best and toughest player. He ran for 1,745 yards, averaging 11 yards a carry, and scored 22 touchdowns. Colt wants to play college football like his father, Mike, but is frustrated that his tiny size has scared scouts away. He is being recruited, however, by the U.S. Naval Academy for wrestling, a sport where he is undefeated in high school and a two-time state champion.

**Mike Rogers**, assistant coach: Mike is Colt's father and was the Redmen's first all-American. He is a full foot taller and 100 pounds heavier than his oldest son. Mike won a scholarship and played at the University of Kansas in the 1980s. He married his high-school sweetheart, Cally, and both returned home to teach at the Smith Center schools. Mike and Colt love each other, but now walk the tightrope of coach and player, father and son—not always successfully.

---

## Smith Center Facts and Redmen Stats

### Smith Center, Kansas

It is the geographical center of the continental United States.→

It→ has a population of 1,931

It has eleven churches and one bar→

Famous→ native sons are Fatty Arbuckle, silent-film star, and Mark Simoneau, former Redmen and current linebacker for the New Orleans Saints

The Echo is a→ weekly newsletter founded in 1962 by Ivan Burgess, now 84, who gathers all the news that is fit to print about Smith Center

**The Redcaps:** This mother-driven booster group has prepared more than 300 pounds of lasagna for the Redmen's pregame meals at their six home games. They've also prepared more than 400 ham, turkey, and cheese sandwiches for the sack lunches that accompanied the bus ride to Smith Center's seven away games.

### Redmen Statistics

The Redmen have won a Kansas state record of 67 consecutive games,→ currently the longest high-school winning streak in the nation.

They have→ captured five straight state championships, which ties a Kansas State record.

### In 2008, the Redmen

Went 13-0→

Averaged 50 points a game→

Held opponents to an→ average of 9 points a game

Averaged 490 yards a game→

Held opponents to→ 180 yards a game

### Redmen Rules

Life is not about winning or losing; it's about competing. It's about working hard and getting a little bit better each day.

Championships aren't won on the field; they are only played there.

Little boys grow up wanting to be Redmen, and Redmen grow up to be champions.

The games you play in November are the ones you remember.

You live in Smith Center, Kansas, in a community that loves you and watches over you. Each one of you was born to be Redmen.