

In the Lions' Den – Book Review

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It's been almost a dozen years since the Sandusky scandal shattered Penn State's sense of pride and self-worth. The complex web of events encompassed much more than the criminal trial of Jerry Sandusky for serial child molestation. Graham Spanier's new memoir is the first in-depth examination from the inside of the legal whirlwind by one of the key participants. But this is not just the story of how a university president ended up in jail for two months. Spanier's story describes a set of corrupted institutions, the worst a tainted criminal justice system, which come off far worse than the damage and shame he suffered.

From the leaking of the initial Grand Jury presentment on November 5, 2011, it was clear that Attorney General Tom Corbett was targeting Penn State's top administrators with enabling Sandusky in at least one case – the infamous Lasch Building shower incident, observed by football graduate assistant Mike McQueary. Exactly what McQueary saw and the words he used to describe it to Joe Paterno, and then to Tim Curley, Gary Schultz, and Graham Spanier, would become the crux of a legal battle. It would be a conflict that continued even after Sandusky was found not guilty of the charge McQueary testified about and that was the basis for then charging Curley, Schultz, and Spanier.

In the Lion's Den, the Penn State Scandal and the Rush to Judgment is Graham Spanier's detailed story of those ten years. There have been only a handful of books published about the Sandusky tragedy so far and most have focused on Joe Paterno. This fully documented memoir will be invaluable for future historians. But at the same time, that vast number of Penn Staters who want to understand the ins and outs of the full story will find this book irresistible. It is Spanier's ability to mix candor with detail that makes this book so remarkable. Thanks to his academic experience and intellectual background, as well I think, to his sheer willpower, he has read and digested thousands of pages of the legal documents, emails, news stories, and reports that resulted from all the cases and investigations that make up this tangled mess.

Yet, this is Spanier's memoir of his experiences, not a comprehensive history of the Scandal. By virtue of its interconnectedness, he touches on almost all aspects of the affair, but his focus remains his story, and it is personal. He shares his emotions, his depressions, and his medical issues. He bares the humiliation of incarceration, but the academic comes out; he can't help but observe and analyze his situation. He ends up counseling fellow prisoners and concludes with a bullet-point prescription for improving the prison system.

The story is a long one, and in the early going, the reader can become lost in the details, but as injustices are exposed and bad actors revealed, the judicial process is reduced, in the end, to a nub of what Spanier and many others found to be political grandstanding. The foreman of Spanier's original trial jury called his guilty verdict a "gross miscarriage of justice." Others far more learned in the law, called it worse. It's hard to walk away from *In the Lion's Den* with much respect for Pennsylvania's system of criminal justice, much less the NCAA or the leadership of Penn State's board of trustees. This does not answer all the questions by any means, but for the foreseeable future, this will be a critical must-read for understanding at least a major aspect of the Sandusky Scandal.

Lee Stout was Penn State's University Archivist for 27 years and retired as Librarian Emeritus for Special Collections. He is the author of numerous articles on archival topics and Penn State history.

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