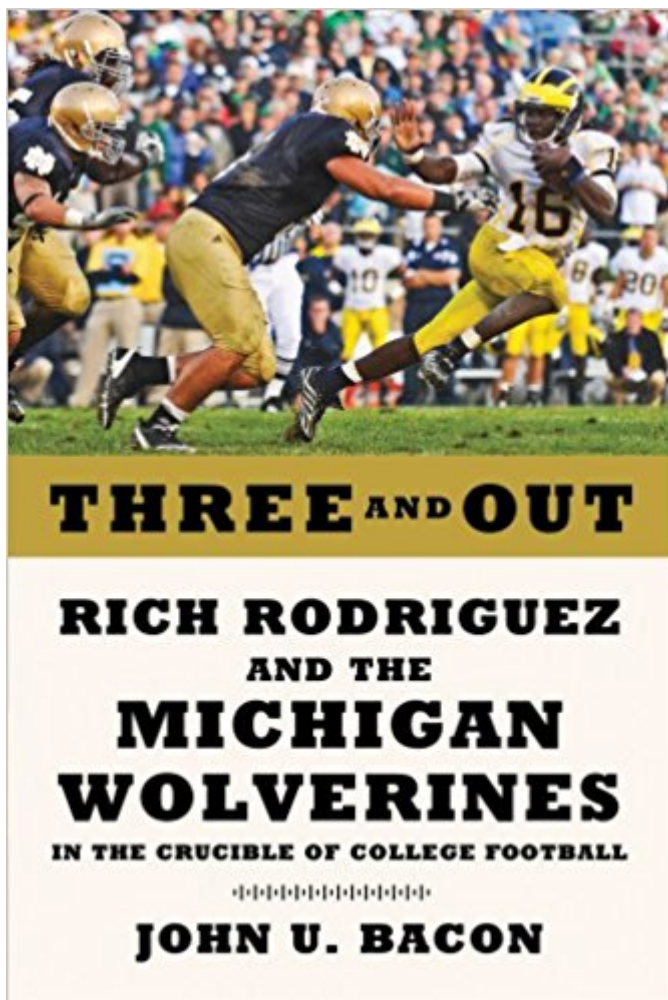


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# Three And Out: Rich Rodriguez And The Michigan Wolverines In The Crucible Of College Football



## Synopsis

Three and Out tells the story of how college football's most influential coach took over the nation's most successful program, only to produce three of the worst seasons in the histories of both Rich Rodriguez and the University of Michigan. Shortly after his controversial move from West Virginia, where he had just taken his alma mater to the #1 ranking for the first time in school history, Coach Rich Rodriguez granted author and journalist John U. Bacon unrestricted access to Michigan's program. Bacon saw it all, from the meals and the meetings, to the practices and the games, to the sidelines and the locker rooms. Nothing and no one was off limits. John U. Bacon's Three and Out is the definitive account of a football marriage seemingly made in heaven that broke up after just three years, and lifts the lid on the best and the worst of college football.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

John U. Bacon found himself with the kind of access unheard of in modern athletics. The result is a remarkable book . . . [If] you are simply a fan of college football, or interested in big-time college athletics more generally, it is a fascinating read. "The National Review" A fascinating look inside the workings of a major-college football program. Rodriguez's failure was everyone's fault and no one's. Unreasonable expectations combined with bad decisions and bad luck led to three bad seasons. Not acceptable at Michigan. Fine reading for college-football fans. "ALA Booklist" John U. Bacon's Three and Out [is] an epic piece of reporting behind the scenes of a college football program going to hell. "New York Magazine" Rich Rodriguez never had a

chance as coach of the Michigan Wolverines. He showed up with a glowing resume and got himself eaten alive. John Bacon's account of Rodriguez's epic failure is a cautionary tale for anyone who doesn't realize that being a major college football coach requires one to be part CEO, part psychologist, part carny barker, and all crazy.

• "Charles P. Pierce, author of *Moving The Chains: Tom Brady and the Pursuit Of Everything*

• College basketball has *Season on the Brink*. High school football has *Friday Night Lights*. Now college football has *Three and Out*, which takes you inside the locker room to show you what it's really like to be a college football coach and player. If it surprised me and it did, I'm sure it will surprise even hardcore fans. If you care about college football, you'll want this book.

• "Adam Scheffer, ESPN

• John U. Bacon is one of the best reporters/writers of my generation. *Three and Out* proves it. It's one of the most riveting non-fiction works I've read in years, in any genre. The eyewitness details from the locker room, the sidelines, and the most powerful offices on a college campus are breathtaking. Get this book. You will thank me.

• "David Shuster, Emmy Award-winning broadcast journalist

• When, several millennia from now, archeologists excavate American ruins as archeologists have done those of Carthage, they may be mystified by the Big House in Ann Arbor, Michigan. How did this 109,901 seat football emporium come to be connected to an institution of higher education? Or was the connection the other way? Without waiting 2,000 years, readers can join John U. Bacon on his eye-opening, and occasionally jaw-dropping, report on the weird world of college football.

• "George F. Will

Sports fans invest great hopes and dreams into their teams. College football fans invest even more, I think, because of the stronger connection they feel with the school and the players. But I've never seen any fans ask more of their teams than Michigan football fans ask of theirs. There are only two groups who are more devoted to the Wolverines, and demand more in return: the coaches and the players. They have the most to gain and the most to lose. They know the stakes. And they accept them even embrace them. It's why all of them, from Rich Rodriguez to Tate Forcier to Denard Robinson, came to Ann Arbor. Not to be average, or even good, but the leaders and best. Anything less would not do. This book explains how the coach and his team fell short and what happened when they did.

The book was good! But as a Wolverine fan it made me want to cry or punch a wall. RichRod was enthusiastic, over the top, innovative but alienated some alum/players, tried to impose his system on players not suited for the option-spread offense, and was incredibly tone deaf. RR's tenure at

Michigan was a disaster, but RichRod didn't do it alone. John U. Bacon did a great job. After reading it I felt some sympathy for the coach, but most of his problems at UM and with the fan base were self-inflicted. I wanted more about the individual players who "bought all in" and those who bailed, but that would probably violate the privacy of some of those players. ... Bacon's book could be used in a leadership class or business management class to show how, despite the best of intentions, having the wrong person using an inadequate selection process selecting the wrong person for the wrong place can produce so many mistakes that the cascade effect craters a successful program. Must read for college football fans

I'm a Michigan alum and a football fan who was left hugely disappointed by the RichRod Error, so *Three and Out* was a must-read for me. I didn't start out as a RichRod hater; I was actually excited about his record and his successes with the spread offense. I thought his hiring was exactly what Michigan needed to extricate itself from the too-predictable and too-slow offense that it had been running. But my initial enthusiasm drained away as Michigan suffered the three worst years in its long football history and it became apparent that RichRod and Michigan were a poor marriage. John Bacon's book is remarkable on several levels: first, it provides the reader with virtually unparalleled access to the inner workings of the Michigan football team, from practices to game strategies, to post-game reactions. Bacon does an excellent job at conveying the intensity and emotion that surround a major college football program -- especially one under the gun the way Michigan was during the RichRod era. For that alone, the book is just wonderful. And Rich Rodriguez appears to be both candid and an honorable man. He was certainly remarkably trusting to let a reporter have the kind of in-depth and extensive access that Bacon had to put this book together. So many college coaches inflate their importance and become secretive control freaks, mistakenly believing that their jobs involve something akin to national security. Rich Rodriguez, whatever his faults, comes across as decent, honest and refreshingly free of such imperial grandiosity. During the long period in which he was being savaged in the press, it was hard to tell exactly what kind of person Rich Rodriguez was. *Three and Out* shines a bright and mostly positive light on him. If there's a weakness to the book, it's Bacon's obvious fondness for his subject, which leads him to underplay Rodriguez's missteps and weaknesses. Bacon acknowledges that Rodriguez made few efforts to ingratiate himself with the fraternity of former Michigan football players and the wider world of fans (raging from the fanatic to more casual casual fans like myself). He also admits that Rodriguez's ignorance and apparent disregard for Michigan traditions also cost him dearly with those groups, and that it wasn't until too much damage had been done that he tried belatedly to repair those

relations. Furthermore, he also notes that Rodriguez had a virtual tin ear for public statements, and that he frequently said things that made him look foolish, naive or worse. But the biggest failing in *Three and Out* is in letting RichRod off the hook for his coaching weaknesses, especially on defense. Bacon subscribes to the theory that the previous coach, Lloyd Carr, had left the cupboard bare of decent players. There's still a dispute as to the strength of that claim, but even if you grant its premise, it still doesn't explain why, for three years, Michigan tacklers still lacked proper tackling technique, or why, during his three years, the defense's efficiency and overall rating deteriorated each year. Nor does it explain why, despite Rodriguez's emphasis on strength and conditioning, his teams were often competitive in the first half and blown out in the second half. In my view, you can't blame the players for the coaching, which was one reason why Rodriguez had to go. Especially after the Mississippi State disaster in the Gator Bowl, I don't think Dave Brandon had any confidence that RichRod could fix what was wrong. While *Three and Out* has some weaknesses, it's still a great look at the Michigan football program during the time of its greatest adversity.

This is a wonderful book, full of insight and very well written. I think it should be required reading for anyone who follows UM Football. It just goes to show that a lot more goes on than what we read in the headlines during any given football season. After Rodriguez failed to produce in his first three years I was happy to see him go. But after reading Bacon's account of what really happened I can only sympathize with his situation. It is truly shameful how he was treated at the UM and I am somewhat embarrassed to say that was my school. For what its worth, my own take on the program's demise is that the loss to App State in 2007 was the beginning of the end. That loss was on Carr's watch. And one of the ironies of this riveting story is how Carr has been put on a pedestal by UM alums and football people. After reading Bacon's book, let me just say that I don't think Carr is a very gracious, or nice person and he is much to blame for Michigan football's current woes. If Michigan wants to get its football program back they need to clean house. But it all starts at the top, with the President of the University for that is the office that oversees the Athletic Dept. Bacon also makes this clear in his account and lays some of the blame for the Rodriguez debacle on President Coleman. In short, if you follow Michigan football and care deeply about the program, read this book.

It was a great book that shed light on the treatment of Rich Rodriguez and how he was set up to fail by the former head coach and the administration. After reading this book and seeing the hypocritical way they treated their head coach from the start I can honestly say that I could never have any respect for nor cheer for the Michigan football team ever again. I do respect John Bacon for giving

us a page turning inside look at what happened and I would recommend this book to anyone who wants a thorough account of how a big ten football program operates as well as how football coach can be sabotaged by those who should have been trying to help him succeed.

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