



Kings of the Mountains: How Colombia's Cycling Heroes Changed Their Nation's History

Matt Rendell

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For the first time Matthew Rendell tells the little-known story of a Latin American country in which cycling is the national sport, whose sportsmen, denied the enormous benefits of prosperity, cutting-edge technology and unlimited sponsorship, have nevertheless achieved prodigious cycling feats both at home and abroad, and helped to forge for Colombia a heroic national identity. He tells of how, during the fifties, Colombia's own top cycle race, the Vuelta de Colombia, was still being held on dusty, unpaved roads - with consequentially ghastly accidents; of how the first top European cyclists who came to race in Colombia found themselves utterly vanquished by its endless mountain climbs; of how the biography of Colombia's first cycling superstar was written by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Then, following the story through to the seventies and eighties, he shows how Colombia's cyclists began to make their mark abroad, even in the ultimate competition, the Tour de France - and, while they may have lacked the team discipline and the pace training to win the race itself, how to them the premier accolade was to become King of the Mountains, by beating everyone else in the Tour's most draining mountain stage. And he traces the gradual process whereby Colombia's irremediable political instability led to the rise of the cocaine cartels, and how, in the world of cycling, sponsorship and the simple desire to achieve the best became inextricably linked with the world of drug smuggling. Kings of the Mountains is a remarkable sports book about outstanding heroism and superhuman achievement, the natural follow-up to the literary interest in cycling generated by Lance Armstrong winning the William Hill.

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