

# John R. Tunis and the Sports Novels for Adolescents: A Little Ahead of His Time

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Over the past thirty-five or so years, readers have witnessed two trends in young adult novels: improved literary quality and the increasingly realistic treatment of adolescence. During that period, themes of the growing up process have expanded significantly, including several which were taboo before the late 1960's. Furthermore, these credible themes were to be inferred from a widening range of topics found in the YA texts: minority neighborhoods, gang activities, violence in suburbia, intimate boy-girl and same-sex involvements, teenage pregnancy, premarital sex, single parentage, drop-out life, addiction to alcohol and drugs, parent/offspring violence and many more. Such issues were seldom raised in earlier young adult fiction. Interestingly, the novels written during this period have rarely been focused on sports—a widespread preoccupation of U.S. teenagers, especially males, over the past two centuries.

Dorothy Pettit's comprehensive survey/analysis of well-written YA novels (1960) provided a list of 25 novels which she identified and then evaluated for their literary quality. None of these popular, stylistically mature, credible texts dealt with athletic topics. Some 23 years later (1973), Alfred Muller's follow-up dissertation, using the Pettit method of identification/analysis, produced another 25-novel list. None of those texts dealt with sports and young people either.

Alleen Pace Nilsen and Kenneth L. Donelson provide an "Honors Sampling" in the Appendices of their extensive treatment of YA literature, *Literature for Today's Young Adults* (six editions appearing in 1971-2001). The "Sampling" begins with novels published in 1971 and includes a brief statement of their subject matter. The Nilsen/Donelson (or, in some editions, the Donelson/Nilsen) text is now in its sixth edition, thus covering novels written over the past quarter century. It was not until their fourth edition (1995) that any literary works on the topic of sports appear. Finally, in his ongoing periodic review of "Best Written YA Novels", Ted Hipple has identified only one sports text thus far, Chris

Crutcher's *Iron Man* (1995).

It is, therefore, only in recent years—the late 1980's to date—that YA authors have begun to use the backdrop of adolescents' athletic activity for the themes they propound. In the "Book Review" section of *ALAN Review*, books about the sports topic can be found with increasing regularity. Today, a reader or investigator of YA texts would find the names of Chris Crutcher, Walter Dean Myers, Matt Christopher, Chris Lynch, Randy Powell, Rich Wallace, and Adrian Fogelin, among others. The Fogelin text, *Crossing Jordan* (2000) reflects another recent dimension of YA sports fiction: the focus of *female* athletes in both amateur and professional ranks. Donald Gallo's excellent short story collection, *Ultimate Sports* (1995) provides recent examples of the topic in that

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*Whether these novels are set in Brooklyn, New York, or a small Midwestern town, they almost always feature an example of the theme of the search by young persons for self-definition—the central issue in all of the YA novels found on both the Pettit and Muller lists.*

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genre. It should also be noted that Robert Lipsyte, a well-known syndicated sports journalist of this half-century, wrote a YA novel (his first) titled *The Contender* in 1967, about the trials and tribulations of an African American teenage drop-out from Harlem who approaches self-identify as an amateur boxer. Recently, after an extended hiatus, Lipsyte has published additional YA novels on the subject of sports.

In the late 1930's and following, however, a novelist named John R.

Tunis began publishing a long series of books about various athletic situations and issues of his day. A Harvard-educated, Eastern establishment, upper middle class, white male journalist/editor, Tunis wrote during the era 1938-1973. His death in 1975 punctuated a literary career which featured a preoccupation with U.S. athletics, both amateur and professional and, in a thematic sense, transcended the sports-for-sports sake pulp fiction of that era.

The recency of serious YA writers' preoccupation with the athletic activity of adolescents, described previously, is one more reflection of contemporary authors' attempts to present the "real world" of the teenager in an arresting and sophisticated manner. The era in which Tunis wrote, however, was one in which the Zane Greys, the Edgar Rice Burroughs, the Carolyn Keanes, and the Grace Livingston Hills were producing their Super Boy/Super Girl novels, works which were ex-

tremely popular but almost totally devoid of literary quality. It was also one of narrow, melodramatic social perspectives, one in which Hairbreadth Harry, the WASP, spotless warrior, always hit the game winning homer in the last of the ninth, always waving to the handicapped kid in the grandstand as he crossed home plate. All in all, that pre-World War II period was still immersed in the residue of the Horatio Alger spirit, one that dominated the books-for-young-people scene for three-quarters of a century.

Tunis, however, did not fit that mold and, in a clearly limited manner, provided a series of YA novels which reached beyond the ambiance of the Algeresque sports books. Several of these novels explored the social contexts in which games were played and probed the fears, anxieties, and egos of young male athletes who were the headliners of their times. A number of Tunis texts dealt primarily with sports as struggle and didn't venture far beyond those confines. That group was almost exclusively concerned with the fate of the old Brooklyn Dodgers and reflected their author's die-hard commitment to that colorful Boys-of-Summer team of yore. In fact, Tunis' final Dodger novel, *Schoolboy Johnson*, was published in 1958, the year after Walter O'Malley decided to break all those Flatbush hearts by moving the team to Los Angeles.

Major league rookies face rites of passage quite similar to those of senior high athletes. What follows is a cryptically annotated list of those novels in which such searches go on. It should also be stated that a number of these critical narratives are interlaced with social conflicts faced by communities of Tunis' times. It will quickly become obvious that they are almost identical to several being faced by YA's at the outset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as well as the communities in which they reside. In order of publication, they are:

1. *Champion's Choice* (1940) - a young, highly talented female tennis player succumbs to the wishes of her family and gives up the opportunity to become an international competitor in order to marry a longtime boy friend.
2. *All American* (1942) - a star YA athlete leaves his prep school because of peers' racial, ethnic, and social prejudices and enrolls in a high school where he meets initial hostility.
3. *Keystone Kids* (1943) - two outstanding young brothers move up to the Brooklyn Dodgers where they meet with inter-squad antagonisms and virulent anti-Semitism.
4. *Yea! Wildcats!* (1944) - a young, Indiana high school basketball coach leads his small town team into the state finals while encountering adult interference and extreme racial bigotry.
5. *A City for Lincoln* (1945) - the protagonist noted in #3 above gives up his coaching position, runs successfully for public office, and confronts civic corruption with mixed results.
6. *Rookie of the Year* (1946) - a rookie Dodger pitching ace battles alcohol addiction and the manipulations of a devious, self-serving, front-office club employee.
7. *Highpockets* (1948) - another Dodger rookie, a self-centered slugger from a small North Carolina town, changes his behavior as he deals with a child whom he has seriously injured.

8. *Young Razzle* (1949) - yet another Dodger rookie, an all-around infield star, struggles with his teammates' jealousy as well as attempts to overcome his hatred of his father who is by now an over-the-hill, drunken Dodger pitcher.

9. *The Other Side of the Fence* (1951) - an upper middle class prep school graduate hitchhikes his way across the USA, golf clubs on his shoulder, learning about life through a series of humbling experiences.

10. *Go, Team, Go* (1954) - a talented small-town high school basketball team is nearly destroyed by the delinquent, often criminal behavior of certain players. Some survive the experience; others don't.

In order to provide a closer look at this author's attempt to demonstrate where sports sometimes touch contemporary social issues, three texts will be explicated below:

1. *All-American* Ronny Perry is a standout athlete at The Academy, a typical private preparatory school. During the game with their traditional rival, Abraham Lincoln High, Ronny and a long-time teammate seriously injure a key opponent, putting him out of the game and preserving a hard-fought victory. The injured player, Meyer Goldman, is hospitalized, and Ronny initiates a series of visits with him, a courtesy his teammates eschew. As their relationship deepens, Ronny learns about the anti-Semitism Meyer has had to endure:

"Uhuh, Y'see, Ronald, it's like this. A Jewish boy, now, he's behind the 8-ball all the time. It isn't enough to be better than the other guy, he's gotta be a whole lot better."

"Has he? How you mean, Meyer?"

"Well, I mean like this. Is he after a job, he's gotta be twice as smart as the other boy, else he don't land that job. Get me?"

Ronald got him.

"Like, now, is he trying to get a scholarship to college. His marks must be lots higher than the other boy or the boy grabs off the dough. See?"

Ronald saw. The other boy. Why, that's me! That's Keith! That's Tommy Gilmore. It's some of the kids in Abraham Lincoln, even. Ronald saw. What he saw he did not like.

"Well, yes, I suppose you're right."

"Now me, for instance. I want to be a doctor. I want to, understand. I'm set. My old man says sure, he'll help me. He'll give me dough. I get my marks; I'm set. Will I get into Medical School? Maybe so, maybe not."

"Why not, Meyer?"

"Why not! 'Cause I'm Jewish. Lots of the Medical Schools don't want me. They don't say so, out loud, that is. But they don't and I know they don't." His face looking straight ahead was stern. (All American, 72-73)

Ronny also learns how the incident has affected his close prep school friends. Their indifference and even hostility to minority group members of the Lincoln High team lead to a confrontation subsequent to one of the hospital visits. A class mate says:

"You know, Ronny, they have no right to play Negroes on their team." He pronounced the word as if it were spelt Nigrows.

Ronald flared up. "Whad'ya mean they got no right? It's a free country, isn't it?"

"Oh, sure. It's a free country all right. Sure, they got a right, they got a right. Point is they hadn't oughta. Now down south we have separate schools and colleges for Negroes with their own teams and leagues and schedules and everything.

Ronald was stopped. He'd never heard of that. Nor had any of the others. They looked at Tommy on the window-seat with some interest.

"Certain. We give 'em their own teams and all, and they like it. Why, they'd much rather play with themselves."

"How do you know, Tommy?" Ronald was stung by the other's assurance.

"Oh, oh, I know. Down south we understand how to treat Negroes. Up here, you-all spoil 'em." He paused. "Leastways, *we* think. Now we don't have any trouble; we love our Negroes. They're our friends, yes, sir. They are..."

"Well, the way you got to LeRoy's shins and ankles that afternoon didn't look to me like you loved Negroes much, Tommy!"

The other sat up angrily. "Yeah. OK! And I'll give him worse next year, too," he said with emphasis. "Him and that clunk, that boy friend of yours, Goldman, and the rest of those lugs. . ."

"Me too."

"Same here. When you're playing with a gang of thugs like that you can't be fancy. They think every year we're a bunch of softies; well, they found out this time."

"They found out—what?" Ronald was on his feet. Now he knew. He disliked them. Once they had been schoolmates, teammates, friends. Now they were there, over there, across that river, going away from him. He kept calling to them but they moved farther and farther away. "They found out—what? That we wanted to win the worst way, that what the Duke always said in chapel about playing the game was a lot of beeswax, that all Baldy's talk about clean, hard football was tripe once we got on the field and saw we had a chance to trim 'em. They found out a lot of things. That we talked about sportsmanship but kicked LeRoy in the shins whenever we could, and ganged up on Goldman..."

"Yeah! What about them? Maybe they didn't all gang up on you whenever you tried to throw a pass?"

"And maybe they didn't go for your shoulder, that guy Stacey, their end. And Fronzak, always cracking Roger on his bum ankle in the scrimmages, and Mancini..."

"Why, those lugs, those meatballs," said Tommy, "they couldn't play clean if they tried. Those peasants..."  
(*All American*, 39-41)

Appalled by his friends' attitudes, Ronny quits school and enrolls at Lincoln High where he is greeted with athletes' reactions which range from cold indifference to ill-disguised hostility. After being hospitalized as a result of a fistfight with his chief antagonist, Ronny gains acceptance and eventually admiration from his former opponents.

Issues of prejudice, however, are resurrected during the ensuing football season. This time the high school scores a

come-from-behind victory over The Academy. The star of the win is the African-American end, Ned LeRoy, and that success leads to an invitation to play in a post-season game against a Southern opponent in Miami's Orange Bowl. Ronny and his teammates learn, however, that Ned will not be allowed to participate. Unwilling to accept that decision, Ronny leads a crusade to rectify the injustice. This time, he runs into a "kinder, gentler" opposition from the community's movers and shakers. His first obstacle is his coach:

"'Cause I think we oughtn't to go to Miami without Ned."

"You mean to say you'd...you mean to stand there and look me in the face and tell me you'd wreck...you'd ruin our chances against Miami...now look here, get one thing clear. What you propose doing is insubordination. Insubordination to school discipline. We're going down to play Miami. If you don't care to go along, that's your affair. I'll slap Jack Train in your place. We don't need you, we don't need to win, we've never needed victory so much we had to go back on our principles in this school. Just fix that in your mind."

(*All American* 216)

Ronny is not deterred, however, and through his leadership the team votes to boycott the game unless Ned plays. That vote leads to an angry meeting between team representatives and several tribal elders:

"Last year we outfitted the band completely. We're proud of this school. We think it's the best high school in the State. We're proud of the team. Naturally you wouldn't want to do anything to hurt the town, would you? Of course not." He smiled a fishy kind of smile. Ronald disliked him. He looked at Meyer and Jim and could see they disliked him also. Well, he thought, we're sticking together.

Mr. Latham continued his argument. "I said just now it was a question of disappointing one colored boy or forty thousand people in town. Maybe I should have said a hundred and sixty thousand folks here in the County who want to see you go down there and clean up those Southern crackers."  
(*All American* 223)

But Mr. Curry, the school principal, enters the dialogue:

"I wonder...I wonder whether we are being quite straight with these boys." The soft-voiced man behind the desk, who so far hadn't said a word, spoke up.

"What do you mean, straight?" Mr. Latham was angry now. He was almost snarling. "The game's been scheduled. All arrangements have been made with the Central Railroad, all the tickets have been sold. We have to consider the Miami people, you know. We can't put them in a hold; we have responsibilities toward them"

"That's right," echoed Mr. Swift with enthusiasm in his voice. "We have a great responsibility toward our opponents. Fair play. Give the other man a chance. That's one of the elements of sportsmanship. Sportsmanship; must be good sports, you know." He looked around for approval.

"True." The tone was quiet, almost monotonous. "True, but isn't our first responsibility toward these boys here?" Ronald was amazed at the little man's persistence. That mild figure behind the desk changed in his eyes; he really had what it takes; he was a fighter after all. And he was for them, on



their side, not against them as some principals would have been in his place. (All American 224)

The players refuse to back down, and the whole community erupts into heated conflict. This episode reflects one of Tunis' recurrent themes: the exploitation of amateur athletes by well-healed, well-connected, devious community leaders.

As is so often the case with YA novels of that era, the team does the right, self-sacrificing thing and rejects the Miami opportunity. It is, however, invited to play a suburban Chicago high school team in a post-season, intersectional game, as voiced in the final sentence, which implies that "the whole team" is going to Chicago.

Considering the pre-civil rights temper of the times, Tunis' novel gets *this* writer's nod as pretty gutsy. And one further postscript before moving on to a second text: the fact that Mr. Curry, the principal, stood with the team members in opposition to the will of the Big Chiefs merits several hosannas. Wish we in 2001 could clone that guy!

**2. Keystone Kids** Spike and Bob Russell are introduced as a young, small town shortstop-second base tandem playing for the Nashville minor league team. Toward the end of their season, the Brooklyn Dodgers, who are involved in a down-to-the-wire pennant race, purchase their contracts. While the two youngsters, especially the older brother Spike, shine in their brief tenure, the Dodgers lose out partly because of disharmony among some of the stars. This intersquad antagonism re-emerges early in the following season. The frugal, dutiful, perseverant brothers are amazed—and disgusted—by the behavior and attitudes of several outstanding Dodgers: overpaid, self-centered, hyper-critical of "rival" teammates. (Incidentally, in this aspect of professional athletes, Tunis is *way* ahead of his times; c.f. Roger Clemens, Gary Sheffield, Ken Griffey, Jr., *at al.*)

As the squabbles among prima donnas escalate and the team sinks in the League standings, the volatile manager loses his job, and Spike Russell becomes the new field boss. When Spike sets out to control his self-absorbed luminaries, he has a modicum of success. He must deal with another problem, however: the rejection by several team members of a new Jewish player, one Jocko Klein. Even his brother and long-time soulmate Bob joins the more prejudiced Dodgers. Bob expresses his sentiments in a Boston hotel room:

"Yeah, but this Klein's a Jewish boy."

The elder Russell, seated on his bed in the act of removing his shoes and socks from tired feet, looked up quickly. Had his brother been listening to other and older men on the team?

"Oh? He's Jewish, is he?"

"Sure, didn't you know that?" Then after a moment Bob added with authority, "Won't last."

Now Spike knew. It was the same record, the same words and music. He replied quickly, "Why won't he last?"

"'Cause he's Jewish, that's why. Man, the bench jockey'll get him. They'll ride that baby to death, you see if they don't. The pitchers'll dust him off, too. Besides, those Jewish boys can't take it."

His brother's tone and his words irritated Spike. That phrase, he recalled, had jarred on him when Swanson first spoke it. Now it rankled. "What makes you think so, Bobby? How

'bout Newman on the Travelers and Stern with the Crackers and..."

"Aw, they're yellow. No guts," announced his brother with the finality of a radio announcer reading a commercial. It was the same line, the same expression, the same verdict Spike had heard previously. "Everyone know it," continued the younger Russell. (Keystone Kids 111-112)

One of the worst of the bigots, Karl Case, singles out Klein for intense abuse:

To be sure, everyone on the club addressed the rookie catcher as Buglenose. That was his nickname, his name on the bench and in the clubhouse, just as Fat Stuff and Spike and Rats were nicknames. There was comradeship in it, affection almost. After the card game on the train, however, there was a note in Karl's voice which made the young catcher look up flushing when the swarthy outfielder spoke to him. Naturally Case didn't miss this sign. (Keystone Kids 138)

Out of frustration, manager Russell confronts his confused, fearful, anxiety-ridden catcher. Jocko responds:

It came when I was...le's see...I must have been eight or nine years old. We lived with my grandfather, me and my cousins, a bunch of us kids, so naturally we always played together and stuck together. We never got to know other kids very well. Then one day I was playing alone in the street, and another boy from down the road came by and said, 'Hey, are you a kike? Are you a kike?'"

The words poured out. Klein had no trouble talking now as he told the story of himself which was the story of his people. "'Are you a kike?' And I said, 'Am I a kite? Of course I'm not a kite.' 'Ha,' he said, 'I guess you don't know what a kike is.' So I went inside and found my mother. 'Ma,' I said, 'what's a kike, what is it?' My mother, she looked at me a long, long while.

"Finally she told me. She told me lots, what was behind us Jews, back, way, way back, Spike, back so far you wouldn't understand, back thousands of years. 'Son,' she said, 'you've got to know some time; you might as well know right now. This is what we're up against, all of us, what we've been up against, what we've had to fight since the start of things.' And she told me, told me everything, a lot you wouldn't hardly realize, a lot I couldn't explain. How my grandfather Klein escaped from Vienna, and his grandfather was chased out of Poland, and...and..."

(Keystone Kids 155-156)

The overwrought player becomes almost frenzied in his outpouring of reaction to a life of anti-Semitic treatment. Spike finally calms him down throughout a mixture of authoritative, sympathetic, and rational rhetoric. Jocko then develops the inner resolve first to face down his nemesis Case and then some abusive, threatening members of rival teams. In the literary *zeitgeist* of earlier YA works, he gains the admiration, respect, and acceptance of his fellow Bums. The fortuitous mid-season trading of Karl Case to the Cubs doesn't hurt Jocko's cause, either.

At the novel's conclusion, the Dodgers are unified as a team and are making an impressive comeback after their disastrous start. The author isn't through with his cultural

message, however. In describing Spike Russell's personal appraisal of his Dodger players, Tunis wanders off in a digression about the ethnic roots of several key Brooklyn individuals. In doing so, he provides a primer of diversity in American that is truly a harbinger of the multi-cultural emphasis which preoccupies many United States citizens today:

These were some of the things Spike did not know about his team, the team that was lost and found itself. For now they were a team, all of them. Thin and not so thin, tall and short, strong and not so strong, solemn and excitable, Calvinist and Covenanter, Catholic and Lutheran, Puritan and Jew, these were the elements that, fighting, clashing and jarring at first, then slowly mixing, blending, refining, made up a team. Made up America. (Keystone Kids 198)

It can, therefore, be stated conclusively that *Keystone Kids* is much more than just a baseball yarn. One of its salient features is the cultural make-up, conflicts, and unresolved issues of the United States, circa 2001.

3. *Yea! Wildcats!* Published one year after *Keystone Kids*, this novel deals with social concerns of people living in a very different setting. Most of Tunis' protagonists (all male, minus one) come from small towns. In this novel, and its sequel, *A City for Lincoln*, a small, rural, largely lower middle class Indiana town boasts an outstanding high school basketball team. Under the tutelage of a young, dedicated coach, this team fights its way from obscurity to the Indiana state finals.

In this text, Tunis returns to one of his recurrent themes: the deleterious effects of meddling by affluent adults into schoolboy athletic programs within the community. Sociologists over many decades have analyzed the impact of the "Power Structure" on the direction followed by communities both large and small. In *Yea! Wildcats!*, the youthful coach Don Henderson is greatly admired by the town's big shots while his team is winning. These individuals, however, become antagonistic when the coach makes the following *faux pas* during a private, carefully orchestrated dinner at the home of the head honcho, one J. Frank Shaw:

Their deferential attitude made Don uncomfortable. Why, they act like I knew more about things than they do! He was confused. Because he was confused he spoke the first words that came into his head. They were words he had heard from an older man. "I reckon Springfield [sic] is the same as everywhere else. The kids are O.K.; the kids are wonderful. You can always depend on them to come through. It's us older folks who...who are...who make trouble."

Something warned him to stop. An unpleasant quietness filled the room. There was a queer look in their glances. The subject was changed, quickly. (*Yea! Wildcats!* (1944); reprinted as *An Odyssey Classic* (1989) 99).

In creating this episode, the author has provided an excellent example of Things to Come. Later in the playoffs, as the Wildcats move up to the next competitive level, these civic leaders come up with a plan which, they believe, will

bring the team the state titles on the proverbial silver platter: they will lure to Springfield the father of a star player from another town, using a better job as the bait. When they excitedly present the idea to the coach, he expresses opposition. The argument heats up until:

"Don, listen, boy. You want to sin the State; every coach does. You've lived for it, struggled for it, dreamed about it ever since you started to work with kids. Now with Kates in there we're a sure bet to win. This is our year."

"Mr. Morgan, I don't want a team that buys players. I'd rather take our chances. Lemme tell you they're better'n most folks think, these boys."

J. Frank Shaw interrupted. "Don, you're talking to an old varsity basketball player. For that Piper's slot, Kates is the answer to a coach's prayer. Anyhow, you think this over; just think things over until Tuesday."

"Frank, look. I picked these five kids last season when they were juniors and sophs, not one with a big name; they played the last part of the year and absorbed plenty of lickings. Now they're a unit; at last they're becoming a team; they're starting to roll. They took the punishment last year and earned their spurs, and I'd like to see 'em come through. It won't build up character to shove an outsider in there now; they'll be plenty sore."

"Character, hell! It's the State Tournament we want," said Harry Green. (Yea! 118-119)

The coach prevails, the big dogs are put off, and the team suffers its heartbreaking loss. Don first quits as coach, then is persuaded to return as the story ends. A further issue, however, unfolds during the course of the season. The team has its first playoff success led by an African American player, Jackson Piper. At that time, there is no community reaction to his presence on an otherwise all-white team. One townsman is conscious of the possible future ramifications of Jackson's status: the seedy, diminutive but feisty editor of the town newspaper, one "Peedad" Wilson. One evening he invites himself to sit at the coach's table in a local restaurant. After Peedad makes a few derogatory comments about J. Frank Shaw, the following dialogue takes place:

He (Wilson) laid down his knife and fork on the edge of his plate and, leaning over, looked at the young coach. "You let colored boys play on your teams?"

"They're Americans, aren't they?" His voice was cool.

"Good! Fine! That's the kind of talk I like. Now let me ask you another. Suppose you had five boys, the best basketball players in town, no question about it. They're all colored. Would you play 'em?"

He didn't answer offhand; he thought. For Don Henderson knew the State in which he had been born and raised. He knew this wasn't a question to be answered without thought. So he thought some time before replying. Finally he said quietly, "Mr. Wilson, I believe I would."

"Even if the Chamber of Commerce objected? If Rotary came to you and objected?"

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"If they came to me, I'd listen to 'em because I'm a public servant. But I'd play those boys."

"Even if the School Board intimated to you off the record that if you did they wouldn't be able to renew your contract?"

This time his answer was not long coming. "Seems like I would, Mr. Wilson."

"Fine! Now that brings us back to the municipal swimming pool. You think colored boys are Americans. O.K., d'you think they should be allowed to swim in the pool?"

Don wasn't to be trapped so easily. "Well...yes...I mean...that's different. Now you take swimming..."

"I see. You'll go along just so far. Like everyone else in this town."

The tone made him uncomfortable again. He was annoyed. "See here, Mr. Wilson, I don't mind swimming with colored boys myself. But there's lots of folks in this town that do. They might be right; they might be wrong; anyhow, that's how they feel. In this country the majority rules; they're in the majority here in Springfield."

"Exactly, I'm coming to that. You'd admit, no doubt, that if the colored boys can't swim in the big pool in they park, they should have one of their own."

"Why, yes, I suppose so." (Yea! 75-77)

This racist attitude becomes dramatically evident in the hours immediately following the Wildcats' harrowing loss in the state final. Back in Springfield, deeply disappointed citizens, many who have lost big bucks on the team, others who are showing the effects of listening to the game at local taverns, take to the street. Their intense disappointment takes the following form:

"Frank Shaw's right. He sure knows his basketball, Frank does." "This fella's too young." "He should never have let that colored boy play. It all started back then." "First thing you know, we'll have a colored team representing this town." "A colored team representing Springfield!" "Yeah, ain't that so, Elmer? Ain't that so, Joe? Why, the first thing you know, this fella..."

"Yessir, that's correct. Throwing off one of our good boys for a nigger." "Who is this man, Henderson? Why does he think he is?" "Thinks he's running this town." "Well, he isn't running this town. Nor the colored folks, neither. They're getting mighty uppity lately, you noticed that? They don't know their places like they usta." "Let's do something about it."

"Let's do something." "What'll we do? "How 'bout that colored boy, the boy who held up two-three women in town last month, snatched their purses, remember? He's out on bail. Ain't no justice in this-man's town." "Let's us get the blighter..." (Yea! 283-284)

Coach Henderson, however, is warned on the telephone by Peedad (a clear *deus ex machina*), leaves the team at a restaurant, speeds to the scene, and faces down the angry crowd.

The upbeat, too-good-to-be-true ending of *Yea! Wildcats!* is representative of most of Tunis' novels. During his lifetime, this was the temper of the times in fiction written for young adults. In spite of his persistently happy endings and his occasional use of melodrama, John R. Tunis is an author whose themes foreshadow those in today's young adult novels which feature teenagers, have sports, and deal with certain sensitive, still-unresolved social issues spilling over into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In his attempt to link sports with the communities in which they are played, he broached some highly significant issues in the literature written for and about America's youth.

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*Champion's Choice*, 1940.  
*Keystone Kids*, 1943.  
*Yea! Wildcats!*, 1944.  
*A City for Lincoln*, 1945.  
*Rookie of the Year*, 1946.  
*Highpockets*, 1948.  
*Young Razzle*, 1949.  
*The Other Side of the Fence*, 1951.  
*Go, Team, Go*, 1954.