

W. D. Ehrhart

Coaching Winter Track in Time of War

The boys are running suicides
on the football field today:
ten-yard increments out to the fifty
and back again, push-ups in between.
It's thirty degrees, but they sweat
like it's summer in Baghdad,
curse like soldiers, swear to God
they'll see you burn in Hell.

You could fall in love with boys like these:
so earnest, so eager, so ready
to do whatever you ask, sure of you,
trusting, wanting to please,
full of themselves and the world.

How do you tell them its not that simple?
How do you tell them: question it all.
Question everything. Even a coach.
Even a president. How do you tell them:
ask the young dead soldiers coming home
each night in aluminum boxes
none of us is allowed to see,
an army of shades.

You tell the boys good work and call it a day,
stand alone in fading light while
memory's phantoms circle the track
like weary athletes running a race
without a finish line.

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