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Book Club Kit Discussion Guide

The Last Shot

by

Darcy Frey

(New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004)

Author:

Darcy Frey is a contributing writer for the *New York Times Magazine*. His journalism has received numerous awards, including a National Magazine Award and the Livingston Award. He is currently at work on a book about the environment. [From the book jacket]

Summary:

It ought to be just a game, but basketball on the playgrounds of Coney Island is much more than that – for many young men it represents their only hope of escape from a life of crime, poverty, and despair. In *The Last Shot*, Darcy Frey chronicles the aspirations of four of the neighborhood’s most promising players. What they have going for them is athletic talent, grace, and years of dedication. But working against them are woefully inadequate schooling, family circumstances that are often desperate, and the slick, brutal world of college athletic recruitment. Incisively and compassionately written, *the Last Shot* introduces us to unforgettable characters and takes us into their world with an intimacy seldom seen in contemporary journalism. The result is a startling and poignant expose of inner-city life and the big business of college basketball. [From the book jacket]

Questions:

1. When you imagine the landscape of Coney Island, N.Y. what does it look like to you? What does this landscape have to do with the horizons of the young men in *The Last Shot*?
2. Even though *The Last Shot* lacks photographs, we create images of each player in our minds as we read. What do the portraits in your mind look like? How do they differ from each other?
3. Other than basketball, what is *The Last Shot* about? What themes do you think about (other than basketball) when you read it? Are any of these themes surprising to you? Why?
4. Darcy Frey writes with great knowledge and understanding of these young men. How do you think he gained their trust? What challenges do you think he overcame in order to write this story?

5. Everyone in *The Last Shot* has to overcome obstacles at times. What obstacles appear in the lives of these young men? Where do they come from? Family? School? Society? Elsewhere?
6. The four young men in *The Last Shot* are influenced by parents, teachers, coaches and scouts, and the writer Darcy Fey himself. Knowing what you know about these young men, what counsel or advice would you give to the adults who appear in the book? What is the best role for an adult to play in the life of a young athlete?
7. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has developed a code of sports ethics, an “ethical framework to combat the pressures in modern day society, which appear to be undermining the traditional foundations of sport.” Where might an “ethical framework” have made a useful difference in *The Last Shot*?
8. If you could give the young men at the center of *The Last Shot* two or three lessons to guide them in their lives, what would those lessons be about? Where did you learn them? How would you make the lessons clear?
9. Here are six nouns: heart, teamwork, courage, game dream, success. How would you talk about any one of them as you describe *The Last Shot*? What other nouns would you use to explain the book?
10. Here are six adjectives: kind, hopeful, aware, strong, complex, caring. Do they describe any of the people in *The Last Shot*, or do they describe any of your feelings as you read this book? What other adjectives would you use?
11. In *The Last Shot*, Darcy Frey uses the phrase, “basketball as an occasion for self-expression” (p. 91). What does this mean to you?
12. The word “play” is usually associated with a game. But it can also mean something dramatic on a stage, something amusing or fun to do, or a kind of conduct or quality (as in “fair play”), or even betting, as in “to play against the odds.” We also talk about something possible as being “in play.” What kinds of “play” do you see in *The Last Shot*?
13. What happens to players in a basketball game? What does a good player think about? How does a good player think about other players? What do good players think about themselves?

[Questions by David Carr, associate professor, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Information and Library Science.]

Further Reading:

Big Game, Small World. Alexander Wolff. New York: Warner Books, 2002.

Blue Blood: Duke-Carolina: Inside the Most Storied Rivalry in College Hoops. Art Chansky. New York: T. Dunne Books, 2005.

Cross-X. Joe Miller. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006.

Eagle Blue: A Team, a Tribe, and a High School Basketball Season in Arctic Alaska.. Michael D'Orso. New York : Bloomsbury Pub. : Distributed by Holtzbrinck, 2006.

A Home on the Field: How One Championship Team Inspires Hope for the Revival of Small Town America. Paul Cuadros. New York: HarperCollins, 2006.

Hoop Roots: Basketball, Race and Love. John Edgar Wideman. Boston : Houghton Mifflin, 2001.

The Miracle of St. Anthony: A Season with Coach Bob Hurley and Basketball's Most Improbably Dynasty. Adrian Wojnarowski. New York: Gotham Books, 2005.

To Hate Like this is to Be Happy Forever: A Thoroughly Obsessive, Intermittently Uplifting, and Occasionally Unbiased Account of the Duke-North Carolina Basketball Rivalry. Will Blythe. New York: Harper Collins, 2006.