

Last Shot by John Feinstein

Subjects: Basketball; Journalists; Gambling; Mysteries

Award: Edgar Allan Poe Winner

Book Lists: Gifted, Middle School, Reluctant Readers

Props: Basketball



(Start with basketball) Basketball, 13-year-old Stevie Thomas, loved basketball. And if he could wake up one morning and be anybody in the world, it would be star college basketball player, Chip Graber. Graber was a senior for Minnesota State University (MSU) and he had led his team to the National Championship, the Final Four. There are 64 college teams and MSU had become one of the four regional champions. After the annual NCAA Tournament, the Final Four, MSU could become the new National Champion.

There were two reasons Stevie could identify with Chip Graber. One, they both loved basketball (*Put basketball down*) and two, they were both short. Graber, although an excellent basketball player was short, only five eleven. But as Dick Vitale always said on TV, “he was an absolute jet.” He went past people before they even knew what had happened. But that’s where the similarities ended. Stevie was not even close to being fast like a jet. He was more like a prop plane. Putt, putt. He had made the 8th grade basketball team at his school, but he only got to play when the team was way ahead or way behind.

No, he wasn’t able to show his love of basketball on the court, but he could do it on paper. He wrote sports articles for his monthly school newspaper and he was good at it. After all, he had taught himself to read at age five using the sports section. The reporters were heroes to him as much as the players and coaches. So, when he heard about the sport’s writers contest, he entered. Being a winner meant that he would be able to go to the Final Four and to go there with a press pass. The day he got the letter saying he was one of two winners, he read it

three times before showing it to his mom to make sure it was real. Arrangements were made and he and his Dad set off for the tournament. When Stevie arrived, he was in heaven. He met players, coaches, sports writers, and TV sports commentators. He also met the other winner, Susan Carol Anderson. She was also in 8th grade, and she was tall, pretty, and smart. Really, the whole thing was a dream come true for Stevie.

But sometimes dreams turn unexpectedly into nightmares. Although everything started out just fine, events took a turn for the worse when Stevie and Susan Carol overheard a conversation they weren’t meant to hear. They had been nosing around looking for a story, when they accidentally overheard a conversation between Chip Graber and a charcoal gray suited man. When the conversation was over, the two realized that they had just heard the best player in the country being blackmailed to throw the championship game. Chip was being forced to make sure his team lost. As fans, they were horrified. As reporters, they wanted answers.

But what could they do? Tell someone? But who? Who’d believe them? They were just kids, but this wasn’t kids stuff, it was serious, big money, careers on the line kind of stuff. And you can bet there were people who did not want them to be digging up any answers to their questions. This story was too risky for kids to investigate. But of course, they had to, didn’t they? Who else would do it? They had only two days, just 48 hours before the big game. Time was running out. Find out what happens next. Read (*Hold up book*) *Last Shot* by John Feinstein.