



FRED BOWEN
SPORTS STORY

REAL HOOPS



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Summary: When Ben and Logan go to a recreation center to practice basketball with more experienced players in hopes of getting on the freshman team, they meet Hud, who could be the perfect point guard if he is willing to listen to the coach.

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Chapter



Hey, Logan! I'm open!" Ben Williams shouted, raising his hand to call for the basketball.

Logan Moore was trapped. Two defenders were all over him, waving their arms wildly, trying to slap the ball from his hands. But Logan was tall and he held the ball high, out of their reach. When he heard Ben's voice, he turned and flicked him a two-handed pass.

Ben caught the ball and sent a jump shot spinning toward the hoop. The ball splashed through the chain net. A perfect swish!

"That's game," Ben said, walking over to the park's water fountain. "10-5."

“You want to play another?” Logan asked as he waited his turn for a drink. He stood with his head bent slightly forward, the way he always did around his shorter friends.

Ben looked around the park. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. “Nah, let’s get out of here.”

“Don’t you want to play?” Logan said. “Tryouts for the freshman team are in a couple of weeks.”

“I know,” Ben said. “That’s why I don’t want to keep playing here. Nobody here can cover you...or me.”

“So where do you want to go?”

“How about the Westwood Recreation Center?” Ben suggested.

“Westwood?”

“Yeah. They’re supposed to have some really good games.”

“A lot of older guys play over there,” Logan said.

“That’s why we should go,” Ben said, running a hand through his sweaty hair. He was just a few inches shorter than Logan,

but he looked every bit the athlete. “We aren’t going to get any better playing against a bunch of little kids. The L7 bus goes right near the Center. Come on.”

“You got money?”

“I’ve got enough for both of us.”

Logan looked around at the other kids pushing up shots toward the basket. None of them were very good. “Okay. Let’s go.”

Minutes later, the two friends dropped onto the back seats of the L7 bus. Almost immediately they started talking about the upcoming basketball tryouts at Roosevelt High School. Ben and Logan had played together for years and they were both hopeful about making the freshman team.

“I figure we’ve got you at center,” Ben said, confidently spinning the basketball in his hands. “And me at shooting guard.”

“Andrew Milstein, Jordan Ferraro and Alan Dawson can all play forward,” Logan said.

“Yeah, and Sam Molina is big enough to back you up.” Ben gazed out the bus window. The large green lawns of their neighborhood

had given way to the tight, crowded streets of downtown. “We could use a point guard, though,” Ben said. “We need somebody who can handle the ball, push it upcourt, and pass.”

“Levon Efford is okay at point guard,” Logan said, with a shrug.

“That’s the problem,” Ben said. “He’s just *okay*.”

“Eighth and Westwood,” the driver announced.

“That’s us,” Ben said. The two boys scrambled off the bus and onto the sidewalk. They jogged toward the rec center, bounce-passing the basketball between them.

“There it is,” Ben said. He pointed down the street to a large brick building surrounded by playing fields and a half-dozen outdoor basketball courts. The courts were filled with players and the sounds of balls hitting the pavement and clanging against loose metal rims.

“Looks just like our playground,” Logan said, checking out the kids on the courts.

“The really good games are supposed to be inside,” Ben said. He tucked the basketball under his arm and headed for the front doors.

A man with gray hair and reading glasses tilted on the end of his nose looked up from behind a long desk. “You boys new to Westwood?” he asked.

“Yeah,” Ben said.

“Okay, then, you’ll have to sign in.” The man nodded toward a nearby computer. “Just type your names.”

“Do we have to pay?” Logan asked.

The man shook his head. “No, we just like to keep track of how many people use the Center.” He looked at the ball under Ben’s arm. “If you’re looking for a good run, the best games are back there,” he said. “And by the way, I’m Mr. Sims, the director.”

“Thanks, Mr. Sims,” Ben said. He and Logan walked past the desk and stood at the big Plexiglas window that overlooked the basketball court.

Just as the boys had expected, the games

were a mix of high school and college kids. Some of the players looked even older. There were two games going and a bunch of guys waiting in the bleachers. The games were fast and loud. Ben could hear the players' shouts through the glass.

"Who's got him?"

"Watch out for Hud!"

"Gimme the ball, gimme the ball!"

A skinny kid in baggy red shorts and a sweaty T-shirt dribbled downcourt at top speed. He cut right, bringing the defender with him. Then he flipped a no-look pass to his left. The pass flew straight into the hands of a player under the basket who quickly laid the ball against the backboard and into the net.

"Whoa! Nice pass," Logan said.

"I told you the games were better here," Ben said. "Let's go down."

The boys barreled through the door. As they scrambled down the steps, they saw the skinny kid in the red shorts drive to the basket and whip a wraparound pass to another player for another easy layup.

“That’s game,” the kid said as he turned to the sidelines. “Who’s got next?”

Five players hustled onto the court to replace the losing team.

“Me and Ty got to go home,” the player who scored the last basket called out.

The kid in the red shorts looked at Ben and Logan. “You guys want to run?”

“Sure,” Ben said. “But what about those guys over there?”

The kid looked at the small clump of players talking to each other on the sidelines. “They’re waiting for a game on another court,” he said “Come on.”

“Okay.” Ben smiled at Logan and the two of them jogged onto the court.

“I’m Hud,” the kid said. “And we got Ice Man and Helicopter,” he added, pointing at two older players. “Let’s go.”

The game was fast—much faster and rougher than the ones at Ben and Logan’s regular playground. Players raced up and down the court, taking open jump shots. Ben hit his first three shots on passes from Hud.

“Hey, we got a shooter,” Hud said, grinning.

But Hud was the player who controlled the action. His passes were amazing. He always got the ball to teammates who could make open jumpers and easy layups. After about an hour of nonstop hoops and several wins, Ben, Logan, and Hud took a break in the wooden stands.

“You guys can really play,” Hud said to Ben and Logan. “What team are you on?”

“Well, we have to try out first. But we’re going to play for the Roosevelt freshman team,” Ben said.

Hud looked out onto the court. “My dad wants me to transfer there. He says the coaches are better.”

“Where do you go now?” Logan asked.

“I’m a freshman at Garfield.”

Ben could hardly contain his excitement. “You should definitely transfer! We could use a point guard like you.”

“How can you transfer?” Logan asked.

“I just have to say I want to study something at Roosevelt that they don’t have at Garfield.”



“Like what?”

“My dad says they teach Chinese at Roosevelt,” Hud said with a shrug. He looked up at the clock on the gym wall. “I got to go,” he added, popping to his feet. “See you around.”

“See you at Roosevelt...maybe,” Ben called after him as Hud disappeared behind the gym door.

Ben and Logan looked at each other without saying a word. They couldn’t believe their good luck.

They had found their point guard.

