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Living Through the Hoop

Reuben A. Buford May

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When high school basketball player LeBron James was selected as the top pick in the National Basketball Association draft of 2003, the hopes of a half-million high school basketball players soared. If LeBron could go straight from high school to the NBA, why couldn't they? Such is the allure of basketball for so many young African American men. Unfortunately, the reality is that their chances of ever playing basketball at the professional, or even college, level are infinitesimal. In **Living Through the Hoop**, Reuben A. Buford May tells the absorbing story of the hopes and struggles of one high school basketball team.

With a clear passion for the game, May grabs readers with both hands and pulls them onto the hardwood, going under the hoop and inside the locker room. May spent seven seasons as an assistant coach of the Northeast High School Knights in Northeast, Georgia. We meet players like Larique and Pooty Cat, hard-working and energetic young men, willing to play and practice basketball seven days a week and banking on the unlimited promise of the game. And we meet Coach Benson, their unorthodox, out-spoken, and fierce leader, who regularly coached them to winning seasons, twice going to the state tournaments Elite Eight championships.

Beyond the wins and losses, May provides a portrait of the players' hopes and aspirations, their home lives, and the difficulties they face in living in a poor and urban area — namely, the temptations of drugs and alcohol, violence in their communities, run-ins with the police, and unstable family lives. We learn what it means to become a man when you live in places that define manhood by how tough you can be, how many women you can have, and how much money you can hustle.

May shows the powerful role that the basketball team can play in keeping these kids straight, away from street-life, focused on completing high school, and possibly even attending college. Their stories, and the double-edged sword of hoop dreams, is at the heart of this compelling story about young African American men's struggle to find their way in an often grim world.

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