

Summer Ball Study Guide

Summer Ball by Mike Lupica

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Plot Summary

Summer Ball by Mike Lupica is a coming of age novel of particular interest to young boys. It follows 13-year-old Danny Walker as he attends an elite summer basketball camp in the hope of finding out whether his lack of height will prevent him from being able to play against bigger and stronger players.

Danny lives in Middletown, Long Island with his parents, Richie and Ali Walker, who have recently reconciled after a long separation. Danny, like his father before him, is a star basketball player whose elite travel team won the national championship in their age group, largely behind the skills of Danny and his friends Will and Ty. But Danny has a serious concern — he is very short for his age and since his father is also less than 5'10" tall, he is unlikely to grow to be as tall as he'd like to be a better basketball player. In the beginning, his height didn't hold him back, but in the past year other boys have been getting taller and he is having trouble competing. He is also considerably shorter than his close friend, Tess Hewitt, on whom he has a not-so-secret crush, but their relationship has cooled since she began hanging out with a new boy who shares her interest in tennis.

As the summer following his 8th grade year begins, Danny's big concern is his upcoming trip to Right Way, an elite basketball camp in Maine. He should be excited about the experience, but he is afraid he'll learn that he is simply too short to play against the top players he'll find there. Making matters worse, just before he, Will and Ty leave for camp, he hurts Tess' feelings and fears that their friendship might be over.

At the airport, Danny and his friends meet and become friends with Tarik Meminger, and upon their arrival they meet Nick Pinto, one of the camp counselors. Things go wrong for Danny immediately when he learns that there's been a mix-up in his housing situation and he'll be living in a bunkhouse for 11- and 12-year-olds rather than with his own 13- and 14-year-old friends. However, he passes up a chance to move after meeting Zach Fox, a boy who is short like Danny and miserable at camp, so Danny feels an obligation to look after him.

Danny also meets his coach, Ed Powers, a tough former college coach who takes an immediate dislike to Danny. Also on Danny's team is Rasheed Hill, a black kid from Baltimore who played on the team Danny's team beat for the national championship and who still holds a grudge. Adding to his bad luck is Lamar Parrish, a tough black kid who is such a star player that he is allowed to get away with anything he wants on and off the court and who also takes an immediate dislike to Danny.

As camp progresses, Danny finds himself sitting on the bench in favor of Rasheed, and when he does get into the game, he seems to find a way to fail. When Coach Powers suggests that he switch from basketball to soccer because of his height, Danny decides to do something he's never done — quit. He hatches a plan to fake an injury that will get him sent home, but changes his mind when he learns that Tess is just across the lake

from camp, visiting her uncle. He mends his relationship with her and she provides the encouragement he needs to stick it out despite his unhappiness at camp.

Eventually Danny and Rasheed put their rivalry behind them and become close friends and allies both on and off the court. Their friendship and ability to work together enable them to turn their team around in time to face down Lamar and his team in the camp's championship game, and Danny learns that while he could be a good soccer player if he wanted, he's really a basketball player despite his height.



Chapters 1 and 2

Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

Danny Walker is a 13-year-old boy who lives for basketball. During the summer following his 8th grade year, he and his closest friends, Will Stoddard and Ty Ross, are heading for an elite basketball camp where Danny knows that although he's always been a star player, his short height will force him to prove himself and his skills once again.

Danny's father, Richie Walker, had been a star player in grade school, high school and college, and played in the NBA until a car accident ended his career. Danny seems to be following in his father's footsteps, including his physical size. Richie's basketball success came in spite of being under 5'10" tall and this summer finds Danny worrying about his own short stature. After Danny was cut from a travel basketball team, his father formed a new team, the Warriors, that won the national championship in their age group when Danny, Will and Ty were in the 7th grade. Their 8th grade team was not as successful, finishing the season with a record of six wins and seven losses, Danny's first losing season ever. The losing record fueled Danny's frustration with his height, as he found himself increasingly coming up against taller players, something he fears will continue when he begins playing high school ball next fall. He has always been a star player despite his height, but he knows this will become more difficult unless he grows soon.

Danny begins the summer with a mixture of emotions. He is happy that his parents are now together after a long separation, but he is disappointed that his close friendship with classmate Tess Hewitt seems to be fading. Earlier this year, a new boy named Scott Welles had transferred to their school, and he and Tess had bonded over their mutual love of tennis. Now Tess seems to be spending all her time with Scott and although Danny denies to his friends that Tess is his girlfriend, he misses their close friendship.

Danny's main concern, however, is his upcoming trip to the Right Way basketball camp in Cedarville, Maine, about an hour outside of Portland. The camp is run by former Boston Celtics star Josh Cameron and is noted as one of the country's most elite camps for outstanding young players. College scouts routinely come to Right Way to scout players as young as Danny and his friends.

Although he should be looking forward to the camp, Danny is secretly scared. He and his teammates received national media attention after they won the 7th grade championship and Danny was recognized as the team's star. Now he's afraid he'll never be able to top that experience, and he's very aware of the need to prove himself over and over again because of his height.



Danny, Will and Ty are at McFeeley Park shooting baskets and talking about the upcoming camp. Ty is excited, Danny is apprehensive, and Will is just going because his friends are going. Will suggests that Danny needs to talk to Tess before they leave town, and when Danny says he's not in the mood at the moment, Will tells him to get in the mood because she is walking toward them.

Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

The book's first two chapters provide the set up for the rest of the novel, and although many details seem unimportant at the time, the reader should pay close attention because there is much information that will be significant later in the book. The main character, Danny Walker, is introduced and the reader learns several facts that will be important as the plot moves forward — he loves basketball and is a stand-out player, his father is a major influence in his life, he is shorter than most other kids and unlikely to ever be tall, and he forms close friendships that are important to him.

Much of the second chapter is taken up with details about the national championship won by Danny's travel team, the Warriors. These details seem of little importance at the time, but there is considerable foreshadowing of events to come later, and many aspects of that particular game and its aftermath are of importance later in the novel. The first two chapters also set up the close friendship between Will and Danny, which will also be significant as the book progresses.



Chapters 3 and 4

Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

Tess approaches Danny, walking from the nearby tennis courts and wearing her tennis clothes. Danny is happy to see her, but very conscious of the difference in their heights as she approaches, so he is relieved when they sit down so the difference is noticeable. He quickly points out that she's been spending all her time with Scott recently, which puzzles and offends her, but Danny only makes it worse by noting that perhaps they weren't as close as he'd thought they were. Fighting back tears, Tess leaves. As she is walking back toward the tennis courts, Scott appears, takes her racket and they walk off together. Danny thinks it feels as though Tess is walking out of his summer.

After Tess leaves, Will and Ty return and the boys play two-on-three basketball. Will is known as a great shooter, but his other skills are not as good. When he is able to block Danny's shot — something he would typically be incapable of doing — Danny thinks it's a bad omen for things to come at basketball camp.

Waiting at the airport for their flight from New York to Portland, the boys meet Tarik Meminger, an African American boy about their age who is also going to Right Way. They become friendly immediately, and Ty and Will enter a friendly competition to out-talk each other.

Arriving in Portland, the boys are picked up by Nick Pinto, a Right Way counselor, who drives them to the camp in a small bus. Nick knows who they are because of their travel team's championship, and he tells Danny that he now needs to take his game to the next level, something that brings back Danny's feeling of dread.

Right Way is a basketball paradise with multiple courts, a large gym and bunkhouses named after arenas. The bunkhouses for the older boys are named after NBA arenas while the ones for the younger players are named for college arenas. Jeff LeBow, the camp director, calls each boy by name and announces which bunkhouse he will be living in. Will, Ty and Tarik are assigned to the Boston Garden house, but Danny learns that there has been a mix-up with his housing assignment. Although his father had been assured that Danny would be bunking with his friends, the message was not relayed properly and now there is no room in Boston Garden, nor in any of the other houses for boys in his age group. To his dismay, Danny is assigned to Gampel Pavilion, named for the University of Connecticut's home court, although he is told it's only temporary. Nick turns out to be the counselor for Gampel and encourages Danny to keep his chin up, but when Danny goes out to the courts to look for his friends, he runs into Rasheed Hill, a tall boy with cornrows and a few tattoos who had been a member of the Baltimore team that Danny's team had beaten in the national championship game. Rasheed immediately makes it clear that he holds a grudge, and Danny thinks that perhaps the camp should be named Wrong Way.



Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

Danny's conversation with Tess establishes her importance to him and the fact that he feels their friendship is slipping away. He isn't a cruel person, but in an ironic twist, his damaged feelings cause him to say hurtful things that push her even further away from him and closer to Scott. The fact that Tess never cries but is brought to near tears by Danny foreshadows other events to come later. Danny's feeling that Will's ability to block his shot is a bad omen also specifically foreshadows events that will occur at basketball camp.

Chapter 4 is particularly important because it introduces several significant characters and sets up the scene at Right Way Camp. The author's physical description of Tarik deftly lets the reader know that he is black without saying it outright, and specific components of his physical appearance will be significant in a pivotal scene later in the book. Likewise, Nick Pinto's physical appearance — specifically his small size — will come into play later, so these descriptions are important to note at this point. The chapter's introduction of Rasheed Hill and his history with Danny are particularly important because his significance as a character is foreshadowed, along with recurring references to the travel championship game in which Danny's team beat Rasheed's team.

The mix-up in Danny's housing situation also foreshadows an important relationship he will form while at camp, and his feeling that the camp should be named Wrong Way is an omen of things to come. The initial bantering between Will and Tarik also becomes a recurring theme and a source of humor throughout the novel.



Chapters 5 and 6

Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

Danny finds his friends in the camp's large gym, which is called The House, and, along with many other campers, they begin shooting around. Danny explains his room situation and Tarik offers to switch places with him so he can be with Will and Ty, but Danny declines, saying that it's only temporary and that Tarik is now one of their group. He also tells the others about his encounter with Rasheed, and Will says it's clear that since Danny had bested him in the championship game, Rasheed is looking for a rematch.

After dinner, Will, Ty and Tarik stay in the gym to watch a movie, but Danny decides to return to his bunk. Arriving at Gampel, he meets Zach Fox, whose bed is next to Danny's. Zach is a couple of years younger and Danny thinks he is a smaller version of himself — small for his age and with similar features. Zach is visibly upset and tells Danny that his parents forced him to come to the camp and that he is not a good enough player for a camp of this caliber. Although Danny has had a bad day himself, he tries to cheer Zach up, but the younger boy leaves and heads out to the basketball courts. Danny follows and they play. Danny is impressed with Zach's skills, although some of his techniques need work. As they are playing, Rasheed and another boy appear and begin to watch. The other boy makes some remarks about Danny's and Zach's size, and Danny tells Zach about his history with Rasheed. He got the best of Rasheed once, but he privately wonders if he'll be able to do it again.

Monday brings the first full day of camp and the workout is brutal. The coaches are current or retired college coaches, and after evaluating the players, they divide them into the teams they will play on for the rest of the month-long camp. Danny, Will and Tarik are on the same team with Rasheed, but Ty is on a different team. Danny's coach is Ed Powers, who had been head coach of Providence College until he was forced to retire. Coach Powers is stern and all-business, and when Danny laughs at a joke Will makes under his breath, the two boys are forced to run laps. When Coach Powers learns that Danny is Richie Walker's son, he makes it clear that he doesn't like Richie. He says he had tried to recruit Richie to play for Providence, but he'd backed out at the last minute and played for Syracuse instead, taking them to the national championship. Coach Powers tells the boys that his team has won the camp championship the past four years and he intends to win again this summer. He then singles out Rasheed as the best player at the camp and says the ball is his until someone takes it away from him.

That evening, Danny calls his parents on the camp's pay phone. He lets his mother believe that everything is fine, but tells his father the truth about Coach Powers and his fear that the coach has singled him out for bad treatment. Richie tells Danny that the coach misled him about their earlier relationship. Richie turned down Providence early in the recruitment process, not at the last minute as the coach said, and later he said no again when a wealthy alumnus offered him money to play there, which is illegal. Danny



asks his father to intervene and get him moved to a different team, but Ritchie tells his son that he needs to stick it out and prove himself to Coach Powers. Danny also learns from his mother that Tess has called and asked for his address.

Later that night, Danny hears Zach softly crying into his pillow. When Danny tries to talk to him, Zach says he wants to quit but Danny says he can't because Danny doesn't quit and Zach is just like him.

Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis

Chapters 5 and 6 are extremely significant because they set up relationships and situations that will come back around many times as the story progresses. The most important components are the introduction of Coach Powers and Zach Fox, who will become major characters and significant figures in Danny's life at camp.

Zach is, in many ways, a younger version of Danny, and Danny recognizes this right away. The physical resemblance is striking, including Zach's small size, and again the reader sees how important this issue is to Danny. It's the first thing he notices about a person — Tess is taller than he is, Zach is short for his age, Nick is short, Rasheed and his friend are tall. Seeing Rasheed and his friend, and hearing the other boy's comments, only serve to reinforce Danny's fear that camp is going to be a bad experience for him.

Another similarity between Danny and Zach is the fact that neither wants to be there, but for slightly different reasons. Danny lives for basketball and knows he's good, but fears that his size will make it difficult for him to compete, while Zach simply doesn't think he's good enough overall to be here. Despite his own problems, Danny relates to Zach immediately and tries to help when he sees how miserable the younger boy is. Danny's comment to Zach about not quitting is a very significant piece of foreshadowing since Danny will soon come close to doing just that.

The other significant relationship introduced in this section is the one between Danny and Coach Powers. Danny gets off to a bad start with the coach by making a very simple mistake — laughing at Will's joke — but the situation quickly escalates when Coach Powers learns who Danny's father is and reveals that there is a bad history between them. He paints Richie in a bad light to his son, but fortunately Danny learns the truth quickly when he talks with his father, and the fact that Coach Powers misrepresented the situation makes the reader increasingly wary of his motives. This section is filled with foreshadowing, including the importance of the camp championship to Coach Powers and the competition between Danny and Rasheed for a position on the team. It also establishes the relationships that will become the most important to Danny over the course of the camp — his relationships with Coach Powers, Rasheed, and Rasheed's companion.



Chapters 7 and 8

Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

Camp director Jeff LeBow tells Danny that he has found a camper who is willing to move out of the Boston Garden bunkhouse so Danny can room with his friends, but he declines, feeling a responsibility to stay with Zach. Will and Ty are baffled by Danny's decision, but Tarik understands that he's being a stand-up guy.

The second day of camp is even harder than the first one. Coach Powers has placed Rasheed and some of the other taller boys on his first team, while Danny, Will and Tarik are on the second team. Coach Powers continues to favor Rasheed. When the two teams scrimmage, he assigns Danny to guard Rasheed, saying the two boys should get reacquainted, and he comments that the referees were actually the ones who had decided the travel championship game. Danny can't resist disagreeing with him, but gets nowhere with his argument, and Danny's team is seriously over-matched in the scrimmage. Danny plays poorly and is unable to rise to his usual standards. Will plays poorly too, but everyone knows that Danny is the one Coach Powers loves to pick on the most.

At the end of the day, the coach sets up a situation in which the game is tied with one minute left on the clock. Danny sets up a play, but it goes horribly wrong and Rasheed makes the basket that wins the game for his team. During the course of the game, Danny injures his knee, but although it is swollen and sore, he insists that he's fine and continues to play.

That evening, Danny and his friends take advantage of an opportunity to go into Cedarville for a few hours and Danny invites Zach to come along. They end up at an ice cream parlor called Pops, where they, along with some other campers, enjoy themselves telling stories about their first couple of days at camp. As they walk around town, they spot a basketball court behind a church and even though they've played all day, they decide to shoot around. Zach, who has become known for carrying his basketball everywhere with him, supplies the ball, and the boys are excited because this is the first time all week that basketball has been fun again.

Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

Danny's instant bond with Zach, and his desire to protect and help him, becomes stronger when he declines an opportunity to move to his friends' bunkhouse. Just 24 hours ago, this would have been unthinkable, but Zach has already begun to have an influence on Danny and a friendship is forming. The bond is strengthened again when Danny invites Zach along on their trip into town, and his friends accept the younger boy without an argument. The reader also learns that Zach takes his basketball everywhere, a fact that foreshadows an important event later in the novel.



The rivalry between Danny and Rasheed heats up in this section as it becomes clear that Coach Powers considers Rasheed the team's only star. The fact that he caters to Rasheed so completely will become significant in the book's final chapter as the story comes to its conclusion. Again, the national championship game between Danny's and Rasheed's teams comes into play and remains an important backdrop for the story and the relationship between the two boys.

In the final scenes of Chapter 8, Danny's attitude finally takes a turn. As much as he loves basketball, camp has been a miserable experience so far, but when he's with his friends, he's relaxed and at ease for the first time. The author also underscores the importance of basketball to Danny and his friends when, even though they've been subjected to a brutal practice all day, jump at the chance to play a friendly game when they spot a court. Friendships that will be important throughout the book are also further cemented in this section.



Chapters 9 and 10

Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

In the days before the camp's league play begins, the various teams schedule scrimmages against each other. On this day, Danny's team, the Celtics, is playing Ty's team, the Cavaliers. With the Cavaliers ahead 24 to 6, Coach Powers puts Danny in to give Rasheed a rest, and Danny, Will and Tarik bring their team to within one basket as the first half nears the end. They are about to draw even but Danny's good pass is wasted when Tarik takes his eye off the ball and it goes out of bounds. The coach tells them to go to the bench.

Since it's late afternoon and the day's games are ending, other boys come into the gym to watch. As the second half begins, Coach Powers has Danny sit next to him for the first 10 minutes and explains various points of the game to him. Again he sends Danny in to substitute for Rasheed and tells him to run the defense the coach wants, not the one Danny wants. The score is 46 to 40, but the Cavaliers go on a scoring streak and with one minute left, the score is 75 to 50. During a time out, the coach says that the game has been a great lesson that everyone learns the first week of camp — only the strong survive. He tells the boys that from now on, they'll find out who the survivors are going to be.

As play resumes, the coach calls a play that Danny knows well from his favorite movie, Hoosiers. It seems to be going perfectly, but to his surprise, Danny's shot to the basket is picked off by Ollie Grey, a boy on the other team. Instead of having a great memory of the day, Danny's memory now is having everyone in the gym laughing at him as the game ends.

Ollie tells Danny he didn't mean to show him up and calls him "little dude," but Danny blows him off. Wanting to be alone, he goes to a court he thinks might be empty, but finds Lamar Parrish, Rasheed's friend, there. Lamar is known as a basketball bully because he behaves any way he wants since he's so good. Rasheed is his only friend at camp. When he sees Danny, Lamar begins laughing hysterically about his recent humiliation. After taunting Danny, he bounces the basketball off Danny's head and walks away, laughing. Danny sits by the lake for a while, and when Zach shows up and tries to talk to him, Danny blows him off and hurts his feelings.

Danny walks to the houses where the coaches live and knocks on Coach Powers' door. He asks the coach to let him change teams, saying they're not a good fit together, but the coach says no. He then confirms Danny's worst fears by telling that although he's a good player, he's simply too small for basketball and suggests that he consider switching to soccer.



Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

This section of the book is pivotal for several reasons. Although being cut from his first travel team still haunts him, Danny is a stand-out player and was the star of his national championship team, but at camp he can't seem to do anything right. Every time he thinks he's on the right track, something goes terribly wrong. After the national championship game, he received lots of media attention, but now everyone in the camp is laughing at his mistakes and he looks foolish. This is particularly humiliating because the championship team got so much attention and everyone he meets knows who he is and mentions the final game against Rasheed's team. He's also stung by the fact that rather than being a star, he's now being used only as a substitute when Rasheed needs a rest. To make matters worse, his mistakes are hurting him even further in the eyes of Coach Powers, and again his size becomes a factor when Ollie calls him "little dude" even when he's apologizing and trying to make amends. Danny's earlier premonition also comes back around; when Will unexpectedly blocked his shot back in Middletown, he saw it as an omen of bad things to come, and it is a similar play that ends the game and leads to Danny's humiliation.

This section also re-introduces Lamar, the boy who made fun of Danny's size earlier and will become Danny's adversary throughout the rest of the story. Danny's relationship with Zach also takes a turn when he hurts his feelings, recalling his similar treatment of Tess in their last conversation. Both are important figures in his life, but Danny's pride is causing him to push them away.

The most important part of the section, however, is Danny's conversation with Coach Powers. Danny seems to have no trouble summoning the courage to approach the coach, even going to his house to talk with him, and at first the man's kindness seems to show a different side of his personality. Ironically, it is when he is showing a gentler side that he hurts Danny the most, not by yelling at him in front of his teammates, but by confirming his worst fear — that he is too small for basketball and should find another sport. Danny goes to the coach's house hoping to improve his experience by switching to another team, but instead hears the one thing that will cause him to sink even lower.



Chapters 11 and 12

Chapters 11 and 12 Summary

Walking back to the camp, Danny worries that Coach Powers is right, and perhaps he is the first adult to be honest with him about his skills and potential. He has never quit anything, but he's thinking about it now.

Danny comes up with a secret plan to get out of Right Way. He begins by working harder than anyone at the next day's practice. He out-hustles all the other players, retrieves loose balls for the coach, and is clearly putting his whole heart into basketball. Eventually he gets an opportunity to set up a situation that ends with Rasheed slamming into him and knocking him hard to the floor. Danny grabs his knee, which is still swollen from his previous injury, and is taken to the camp's infirmary. The doctor x-rays his knee and says he can't find anything wrong, but acknowledges that some injuries don't show up on x-rays. He wants to send Danny for an MRI, but Danny says his father might prefer to have his own doctor see him instead. He calls home but isn't able to reach anyone, so he returns to his bunkhouse, where he finds Nick. Nick makes it clear that he knows Danny is faking an injury in an effort to go home, although Danny denies it. Danny goes to the camp office to e-mail his mother about his injury, but as soon as he logs on, he finds that Tess is on line and they start to instant message. He tells her he hates the camp and has gotten injured, but brightens up when she tells him that she is visiting her uncle, who has a home in Cedarville just across the lake from Right Way.

Chapters 11 and 12 Analysis

In this section, Danny's strong will and in-depth knowledge of basketball are used for a different purpose. Because he knows the game so well and is so skilled at it, he has no trouble setting up a situation in which he can pretend to injure himself, and he knows that his father's fear of knee injuries, gained from his own playing experiences and career-ending accident, is likely to prompt Richie to let him come home for medical attention. Danny is too proud to simply quit camp, but he compromises his usually-high principles by faking an injury so he can leave without being called a quitter. Much of the background information contained in the book's initial chapters comes into play for the first time here.

The fact that Nick is also short has not been a factor until now, but it is his own size, and the fact that he knows how smaller players move, that tips him off to the fact that Danny is not really injured.

The section ends with an ironic twist; Danny's determination to leave camp leads him to go on line to e-mail his mother, but instead he runs into Tess, the one person whose

presence in the area can make him want to stay despite his unhappiness with Right Way and Coach Powers.



Chapters 13 and 14

Chapters 13 and 14 Summary

Danny finds Will and Ty playing ping pong. They are a little surprised to see him because Nick has told them that Danny might be going home, but brushes off the conversation and tells them that Tess is just across the lake from them. All of them want to see Tess, so Will comes up with a plan to take one of the camp's canoes and paddle across the lake to her uncle's house. Danny goes to the office to call Tess for directions and learns that his mother has been trying to reach him after getting his earlier message about his knee injury. He returns her call and reassures her that everything is fine, then calls Tess for directions. On his way to meet Will and Ty, Danny runs into Zach and as an apology for treating him badly the day before, he invites Zach to go along on their adventure, learning in the process that Nick has also told Zach that Danny might quit the camp.

All four boys head for the docks and get into one of the camp's canoes. The trip across the dark lake goes smoothly and soon they see Tess standing at the end of her uncle's dock, waving a flashlight. Excited to see her, Danny can't resist standing up in the canoe to shout a greeting, loses his balance and falls into the Coffee Lake.

After Danny gets back into the canoe, everyone laughs about what happened and they continue to shore. The other boys go inside to watch television with Tess's uncle while Tess and Danny sit on the porch and talk. Danny apologizes for his behavior the last time they saw each other, and everything between them seems to return to normal. Danny tells her all the details about how badly things are going, even admitting his plan to fake the knee injury and go home. Tess gives him a friendly, but stern lecture, telling him he can't quit. She reminds him that he bounced back after getting cut from his first travel team and says that although surviving the next two weeks will be hard, this is about winning his own championship — in her words, the championship of him.

Chapters 13 and 14 Analysis

The significance of Danny's friendship with Tess comes into play in this section. Although he was working hard on his plan to leave camp, he abandons the idea immediately when he finds out that she is in the area and he has a chance to see her. The reader also learns how strong her influence on him is, since she seems to be the one person who can talk him out of his plan to leave camp. She knows him so well that she is immediately able to relate his being cut from the travel team to this situation in which he's again being told by an adult that he isn't good enough. This is also an example of one of the book's primary themes, sports as a metaphor for life, as Danny's father's words about the relationship between being told you aren't good enough and winning championships come into play.

The strong friendship among the boys is also a major factor at this point. Danny's friendship with Zach has progressed to the point that he knows he needs to apologize for his earlier behavior, and Zach accepts. Despite his age, Zach has become one of the gang and is easily accepted by Danny's other friends. The relationships among Danny, Ty and Will are also showcased during the trip across the lake, as Danny and Ty row in perfect sync just as they are in sync on the basketball court, and Will takes a different role by planning the entire escapade and navigating.



Chapters 15 and 16

Chapters 15 and 16 Summary

The trip back across the lake is uneventful, and when the boys express concern about how much trouble they'll be in if the counselors learn what they've done, Zach says he'll take care of it. When they reach the camp's dock, no one is there, but Zach inexplicably jumps into the lake, then climbs onto the dock, smiling. As they walk back into the camp, they meet Nick and some other counselors, who have gone to look for them. Zack quickly explains that some older boys were picking on him and he left in a canoe to get away, then the other boys came after him. He says he fell into the water and Danny jumped in after him, explaining why they are the only two who are wet.

The next morning, Nick tells Danny that they won't be punished, although he suspects that there is more to the story and that a girl is involved. Danny and Zach go to an isolated basketball court, where Danny gives Zach a broom and tells him he wants to practice ways to avoid having the ball stolen by a taller guy again. They practice, with Zach using the broom to swat down Danny's shots.

Later that day, the league games begin with the Celtics playing the Bulls, a team starring two very tall boys Tarik knows. At halftime, the Bulls are ahead 40 to 24. When another player gets hurt, Coach Powers puts Danny into the game at point guard, his favorite position, and he and Rasheed turn out to be a great combination when playing together. As the end of the game nears, the Bulls are up by only one point. Danny has the ball, but ignores the coach's instructions to pass to Rasheed for the final shot even though Rasheed is clearly open and calling for the ball. Danny takes the shot himself and misses.

Chapters 15 and 16 Analysis

The growing friendship between Zach and Danny continues to develop in the aftermath of the canoe trip. Although Danny is the older boy and has become somewhat of an older brother/mentor, it is Zach who hatches the plan to get the group out of trouble and even has the forethought to jump into the lake to make the story more plausible. The lessons learned on the basketball court — being part of a team and always being there to assist your teammates — are playing a role off the court as the boys prove that they have each other's backs in tough situations.

Earlier foreshadowing comes into play as Danny's frustrations on the court continue and even worsen. All of his basketball instincts seem to have left him and he is unable to do anything right, although the ease with which he and Rasheed play together foreshadows the unexpected friendship they will later develop.



Chapters 17 and 18

Chapters 17 and 18 Summary

After the final buzzer, Will and Tarik try to comfort Danny by telling him he played a good game, but Danny knows all that matters is the final score. He wonders if that brief period of playing in sync with Rasheed was as good as things will ever get for him at Right Way.

That night Danny has his first opportunity to call home and speak with his father. After reassuring Richie that his knee is fine, he confesses that he faked the injury so he could leave camp, but has changed his mind. His father is deeply disappointed, telling Danny that such behavior is not like him. Danny decides not to tell him about his conversation with Coach Powers and the coach's suggestion that he switch to soccer, and the conversation ends abruptly when Richie tells his son that if he wants to come home, fine, but if he stays, he needs to show the coach he's wrong. Danny then calls Tess, who again is encouraging and says she'll try to visit soon by asking to come to the camp and take photos.

The following day, Danny's Celtics have a game against Lamar's Lakers. For the first half, Rasheed is on fire and the Celtics get out to a clear lead, but during the second half Lamar catches fire and his team surges. As the game nears its end, the Celtics are up by only two points and Danny is in the game. Lamar scores a three-point shot and, assuming the game is over, begins to showboat, but Danny calls a time out with one minute left on the clock. He quickly suggests a play to Rasheed and it works. Rasheed scores the winning basket on a pass from Danny.

The following day, Danny finds himself in Jeff LeBow's office and in trouble. The reader learns that after the game, Danny had been helping Zach work on his skills on a remote court when Lamar came along and began taunting Zach about his size. Eventually Lamar had taken Zach's prized basketball and had broken off a needle into it, ruining the ball. Danny had come to Zach's defense and a fight ensued, but just as Lamar had been about to punch Danny, Rasheed grabbed him from behind and forced him to leave Danny and Zach alone. When Lamar asked if Rasheed was taking Danny's side over his, Rasheed said yes.

Chapters 17 and 18 Analysis

Until now, Danny's relationship with his father has been excellent, but it is severely tested when he confesses to faking an injury, something Richie finds completely unacceptable. Again Richie uses sports analogies to teach his son life lessons about the importance of being honest and not quitting what you've started. The rift in their relationship will continue until in the end, Richie, too, learns a lesson about holding a grudge.



This section marks the turning point in the relationship between Danny and Rasheed. The previous section found them playing surprisingly well together on the court, and Rasheed's intervention in the fight between Danny and Lamar brings a further change in their relationship. The reader has been led to believe, up to this point, that Lamar and Rasheed are close friends, so it would be expected that Rasheed would take Lamar's side, especially since he continually brings up the rivalry between Danny and himself stemming from the travel championship. However, a different side of Rasheed is beginning to emerge and it appears that things are not always what they seem to be and people are not always who they seem to be, and their first personal conversation is revealing for both of them. The incident with the basketball foreshadows another event that will take place later in the story, and the friendship between Zach and Danny is further cemented as each comes to the other's defense against Lamar.



Chapters 19 and 20

Chapters 19 and 20 Summary

Lamar goes into Jeff's office first and tells his one-sided version of the story, claiming that Zach had whipped the ball at him and Rasheed had grabbed him from behind. The other boys aren't able to convince Jeff that they were in the right, and Danny, Zach and Rasheed are each suspended for two games and forced to clean bathrooms while their teams practice. Lamar is not punished. The Celtics lose both games in which Rasheed and Danny don't play, putting them down in the league standings.

On the first day of their suspension, Danny sees Rasheed heading to a court to practice and offers to come along. To his surprise, Rasheed accepts and after shooting around for a while, the two boys sit down and talk. Rasheed says that because of his cornrows and tattoos, people judge him by his appearance. His father died when Rasheed was 8 years old after being shot when he was in the wrong place at the wrong time, a common occurrence in his neighborhood. He has been offered opportunities to move to a private school to play basketball, but his mother doesn't want to leave her job and prefers that Rasheed attend the same school his brother had attended. Danny wants to tell Rasheed that he, too, has lived in a single-parent home for several years while his parents were separated, but doesn't think his situation compares to Rasheed's. Rasheed also explains that he is not friends with Lamar, although Lamar tries to make it look that way. As they leave the court, Rasheed says they're boys (friends) now.

The boys' suspension ends and the Celtics win their next game, but afterward Rasheed tells the coach that he has injured his hamstring and needs to sit out the next day's game so he doesn't make it worse before the play-offs. Danny soon learns that he is faking the injury so the coach will be forced to let Danny start in his position, giving him an opportunity to show what he can do.

On his way to the game, Danny sees Tess talking with Lamar. She has gotten permission to come to Right Way to take photos of Danny and the other Middletown boys. Tess loves photography and her camera is her most prized possession. Danny joins them and Lamar subtly taunts him as he admires Tess's camera and pretends to almost drop it. Afterward, Danny tells Tess it's best to stay away from Lamar and she agrees.

Rasheed's plan works and Danny plays his best game ever. As the final buzzer nears, the Celtics are down by just one point and the coach calls a play that will put the game into overtime rather than making a final effort to win in regulation play. Danny thinks this is a bad strategy since several of their players are in foul trouble already, so with agreement from Rasheed, he sets up a play that gives Will the final shot. Will makes the basket and the Celtics win, but the coach is still angry with Danny for calling his own play. Danny thinks that even when he wins here at camp, he loses.



Chapters 19 and 20 Analysis

The boys learn the hard lesson that life isn't fair when Lamar, who was clearly in the wrong, gets off without punishment while they are suspended and forced to clean bathrooms. Sports again imitate life as Lamar, who gets away with a lot on the basketball court because of his skill, also is able to do as he pleases off the court. Lamar also continues to escalate the tension between Danny and himself by talking with Tess, apparently doing so specifically to irritate Danny, and the incident with the camera foreshadows important events to come.

A friendship forged on the basketball court moves off the court as Danny and Rasheed finally have a conversation and get to know each other better. The stark contrast between Lamar and Rasheed becomes more clear as the reader learns more about Rasheed's background, which although tough, has not made him angry or bitter. In fact, his values and those of his mother seem far more similar to Danny's own family than to Lamar's even though they are from similar socioeconomic circumstances. Danny is learning important lessons about how others' lives are different from his. He even resists the temptation to share his own story about his parents' separation because he realizes that it pales in comparison to the murder of Rasheed's father.

The issue of faking an injury comes up again, but this time Danny benefits in a different way. Rather than faking his own injury to get out of camp, he has an opportunity to play more and showcase his talents when Rasheed pretends to be injured, and Danny's relationship with Coach Powers continues to worsen despite his winning play.



Chapters 21 and 22

Chapters 21 and 22 Summary

Danny, Will, Ty, Tarik, Rasheed, and Zach are eating dinner when Tess arrives in tears. She tells the boys that while she was in the restroom, someone smashed her prized camera, which she'd left in its bag outside the restroom door. The boys immediately assume that it was Lamar, but they realize that confronting him would be a mistake because they have no proof. Danny is upset because he's never seen Tess cry before and when he walks her to the dock to meet her uncle, he explains that Lamar is simply a bully. Walking back to Gampel, Danny sees Lamar standing between him and the door. Again Lamar taunts him, but Danny remembers his mother's advice — do not engage — and ignores him.

The next day the boys learn that Lamar has gotten away with breaking Tess's camera because there was no proof that he did it. Danny decides to work on his game in the hope of meeting and beating Lamar's team in the championship.

Danny is getting more playing time now, and he and Rasheed are a formidable pair when they work together. In one of the last few games before the play-offs, the Celtics are playing Ty's team, the Cavaliers, with just a few seconds left on the clock. Danny has the ball and, remembering the earlier game when he took the shot and missed rather than passing to Rasheed as he was supposed to, he looks for a way to get the ball to Rasheed but Ty is guarding him closely. With the clock ticking down, he does the only thing he can think of — he rolls the ball between Ty's legs to Rasheed, who is wide open. However, Rasheed takes his eyes off the ball for a split second and it goes through his hands and rolls out of bounds as the buzzer sounds. Coach Powers ignores Rasheed's error and begins yelling at Danny. Danny is embarrassed because the arena is quiet and everyone is listening, when suddenly the crowd bursts into applause. Josh Cameron, the NBA star and owner of Right Way, has come into the building and tells Coach Powers to take it easy on Danny because the play looks like something he himself would have done. He shakes Danny's hand and says, "Cool pass, kid."

Chapters 21 and 22 Analysis

Lamar again is set up as the bad guy who never gets caught. This time he avoids punishment by threatening to leave Right Way and go to a rival camp if he doesn't receive better treatment, and it appears that he will always come out on top. However, Danny is maturing and learning that it's best not to antagonize him by responding to his taunts. The influence of his parents once again comes to Danny's aid when he remembers his mother's advice about not engaging someone when they're trying to bother you. His mother's background as an English teacher will come into play again further in the story.



Danny's growing maturity is also shown in his reaction to seeing Tess so upset over her camera. He has never seen her cry before, but remembers that just a few weeks earlier, his own behavior toward her brought her to near tears and he vows that he'll never let that happen again. He has only been at Right Way for a few weeks, but the changes in him are obvious to the reader and to Danny himself.

Things are also improving for Danny on the court as his confidence grows along with his playing time and his relationship with Rasheed. Although his spur-of-the-moment decision to roll the ball to Rasheed doesn't work in the long run, his quick thinking is vindicated when Josh Cameron appears and not only congratulates him, but tells Coach Powers that he's being too critical. For the first time, Danny comes out on top in an incident between his coach and himself.



Chapters 23 and 24

Chapters 23 and 24 Summary

The play-offs begin and the boys have somewhat mixed feelings because if the Celtics win, Ty will lose, and if Ty's team wins, the others will lose, but everyone agrees that the most important thing is that Lamar's team does not win. Things have been going better for Danny since Josh Cameron showed up. He is getting more playing time and Coach Powers is treating him with a little more respect, but he is disappointed when he learns that although his mother is coming for the championship game, his father is not coming.

The Celtics play the Bulls in their first play-off game and the Bulls are leading by several points when the coach puts Will into the game. He scores several three-pointers and the momentum begins to shift, but Rasheed soon fouls out. In the game's last few seconds, Danny draws a foul and makes his free throws, sending his team into the next round of the play-offs.

The boys go into Cedarville and while the others walk down the street to buy taffy, Will and Danny sit on a bench and talk. Danny confesses that he has mixed feelings because if the Celtics win the championship, it means that Coach Powers also wins because that was his singular goal since the beginning of camp. Danny wants the coach to admit that he was wrong about him. Danny also tells Will that Tess won't be there for the championship game because she's flying home the following day.

The Celtics beat the Cavaliers, and after the game ends, Lamar begins taunting Rasheed and Danny from the stands, but the boys ignore him. Zach's team wins the 11- and 12-year-old division and after the game, Danny gives Zach a gift — a new basketball like the one Lamar ruined. Afterward, Danny goes to a remote court to practice alone because although he doesn't know how much he'll get to play in the championship game, he wants to be ready. After a hard practice session, he stops to rest and sees Coach Powers standing at the edge of the woods, watching him.

Chapters 23 and 24 Analysis

The strong friendships among the boys comes into play as they express some level of regret that they all can't win. This is an unusual situation for Danny, Will and Ty because they've never been on opposing teams before, but everyone is united in their desire to see Lamar finally lose. However, Danny's close relationship with his father is still strained as he learns that Richie will not be coming to see his final game. Rasheed's father can't come to the game, and Danny's father simply refuses to come because he's angry with his son.

Although things are going better between Danny and his coach, he realizes that Coach Powers' softer attitude is simply because of Josh Cameron's intervention. The basic antagonism is still there, and Danny sees it again when he finds the coach watching him



practice from the shadows. All he wants is for the coach to admit he was wrong about Danny, but when Powers simply walks away, Danny realizes that it will never happen no matter what he does to prove himself. Clearly he has come a long way from wanting to quit just a few days earlier because he continues to practice his hardest even though he knows he probably will get little playing time in the championship game.



Chapters 25 and 26

Chapters 25 and 26 Summary

When Danny's mother arrives at camp, Tess is with her. Mrs. Walker plans to drive Danny, Will and Ty back to Middletown after the championship game and Tess has decided to ride back with them. His mother meets Danny's friends and he is happy that she is there, but can't help wishing his dad had come also. As the group is eating dinner, Danny looks across the mess hall to see Lamar staring at him. Lamar points to himself and mouths the word "me," then points at Danny and mouths "you."

Before the game, Coach Powers gives the team a pep talk and Danny begins to see why he might have been a good coach at one time. The game begins and at halftime, the Lakers are ahead by 14 points. During halftime, the coach is yelling at the team and makes a grammatical error just as Danny's mother, an English teacher, is walking by and she corrects him. Danny thinks that he's now in more trouble than ever, but cheers up when he walks back into the arena and sees his father, who gives him some encouraging words.

The game resumes and Coach Powers refuses to change his strategy even though it isn't working. At the end of the third quarter, with the score 47 to 38, Rasheed surprises the team by insisting that the coach put Danny into the game and refuses to continue playing unless Danny plays also. Rasheed then turns to Danny and asks what strategy he would use, Danny tells him, and the coach puts him into the game. Danny is now guarding Lamar closely, which really annoys him. Eventually Lamar draws a technical foul and Rasheed's free throws cut the Lakers' lead to two points. Lamar retaliates by slamming into Danny, knocking him off the court and into a door. His knee is injured, but he continues to play and his free throws tie the game at 60. The score goes back and forth and in the last seconds, Danny steals the ball from Lamar and wins the game for the Celtics. As everyone congratulates him, Danny takes the game ball and makes a perfect soccer kick in front of Coach Powers, and tells him that although he could play soccer if he wanted, he is a basketball player.

Chapters 25 and 26 Analysis

The book's final chapter has a happily-ever-after ending as the good guys win and the bad guys lose. Just as Danny has grown in maturity, if not in actual height, over the summer, his father sees that he is behaving badly by refusing to come to the game and shows up to cheer on his son, once again setting a good example. Tess, who has gotten a new camera, chooses not to focus on Lamar, who is sitting with his head in his hands after losing the game, but turns her camera toward Danny instead. Danny gets a somewhat grudging respect for Coach Powers in the end when he sees a glimmer of the kind of coach he might have been. Coach Powers' early statement that the ball belonged to Rasheed comes back around when Rasheed finally uses his power and

influence to force the coach to let Danny play at the game's crucial moment, and to use not only Danny's skills on the court, but his knack for strategy that has been eluding him since the beginning of camp.

Lamar's "you/me" taunt implies that the game will come down to a confrontation between Danny and himself, and although that does prove to be the case, it is Danny who comes out the winner. Finally, although he never gets an apology or acknowledgement of his skills from Coach Powers, Danny does get the last word when he proves that while he has the skills to play soccer, he's really a basketball player despite his size. He has achieved his goal — proving to himself and others that he can play against the big boys.



Characters

Danny Walker

Danny Walker is a 13-year-old boy who lives in a small town on Long Island. Basketball is his life and even though he is considerably shorter than any of his friends, he has always been a star player, including on a travel team that won the national championship in their age group. During the summer following his 8th grade year, Danny and his best friends attend an elite basketball camp in Maine where he hopes to prove to himself and others that, despite his height, he can continue to excel against much taller players.

Soon after arriving at camp, Danny meets the people who will shape his experience there. His coach, Ed Powers, seems to take an immediate dislike to him, and it doesn't help matters when Danny's game falls apart. Over the course of the summer, Danny has to try to gain the coach's respect, as well as that of one of his new teammates, who turns out to be an old rival. He also meets a new adversary — a "basketball bully" whose skills on the court allow him to get away with bad behavior. As if those challenges weren't bad enough, Danny has caused a rift in his relationship with his old friend Tess, and he finds himself filling the role of older brother and mentor for his camp roommate, who shares much in common with him, including being short. In the end, basketball camp turns out to be everything he feared and everything he hoped for, and an experience that will mature him beyond his expectations.

Coach Ed Powers

Ed Powers was a coach at Providence University until he was forced to retire. Now he coaches young teenage boys at Camp Right Way, and he brings his harsh and unyielding coaching style to the job.

Coach Powers takes an immediate dislike to Danny Walker and his feelings toward him only get worse when he learns that Danny's father is Richie Walker, a star player he tried unsuccessfully to recruit for Providence. Throughout the summer, Coach Powers holds this against Danny as he singles him out for poor treatment on and off the court. He also plays favorites, making it clear from the first day that Rasheed Hill will be his team's star player, furthering the rivalry between Danny and Rasheed. He sets the bar high, telling his players that his team has won the camp championship several years in a row and he expects this year to be no different. Coach Powers is also the only adult who tells Danny what he fears might be the truth — that he is simply too small to play basketball at a higher level — but Danny must learn whether the coach's opinion is right or wrong.



Rasheed Hill

Rasheed Hill is a black kid from a tough neighborhood in Baltimore who attends Right Way basketball camp along with Danny and his friends. He has cornrows and several tattoos that remind Danny of a pro basketball player. Rasheed played on the opposing team when Danny's travel team won the national championship in their age group and at first, their rivalry continues at Right Way. Rasheed appears to be friends with the camp bully, Lamar Parrish, and he continually razzes Danny about the outcome of their championship game in which he thinks Danny intentionally caused Rasheed to foul out.

Over the course of the summer, Rasheed reveals his true self to Danny and the two boys find that they have more in common than they thought. As their friendship grows, so does their ability to work together on the basketball court, and their desire to defeat Lamar.

Will Stoddard

Will Stoddard is Danny's oldest and closest friend. They've played on the same basketball team for years, but although Will is a great shooter, his other skills aren't as good as Danny's. Will's claim to fame is his mouth. He's a clever, funny fast talker who understands Danny better than anyone and always has his back.

Tess Hewitt

Tess Hewitt is a long-time friend of Danny's who hangs out with him and his friends like one of the boys, although he has a not-so-secret crush on her. Her relationship with Danny appears to be on the rocks, but her deep understanding of him helps guide him as he faces the challenges at Right Way Camp.

Lamar Parrish

An arrogant kid from a poor background, Lamar Parrish is a "basketball bully" whose skills on the court enable him to get by with incredibly bad behavior. He takes an immediate dislike to Danny and taunts him mercilessly because of their height, eventually taking the rivalry out on innocent bystanders who are Danny's friends before he and Danny square off in the season's final game.

Richie Walker

Richie Walker is a former star basketball player who made it to the NBA despite being only 5'9" or 5"10" tall. He passes his love for basketball on to his son, Danny, and uses his own experience to teach Danny lessons about both basketball and life.



Ty Ross

Ty Ross is Danny's other best friend and a fellow basketball standout who attends Right Way Camp along with Danny and Will.

Tarik Meminger

Danny, Will and Ty meet Tarik Meminger on their flight to Maine. He is a black kid from New York City who becomes close friends with the boys and proves to be a match for Will's quick wit and way with words.

Zach Fox

Zach Fox is a mirror image of Danny, only two years younger. He loves basketball, but like Danny, he is challenged because of his height. He is miserable at camp until Danny becomes his roommate and friend, and takes him under his wing.

Nick Pinto

Nick Pinto is a college senior and a counselor at Right Way Camp. Like Danny, he is short for a basketball player and helps Danny learn important lessons about quitting.

Josh Cameron

Josh Cameron is a former star player for the Boston Celtics and owner of Right Way Camp.

Jeff LeBow

Jeff LeBow is director of Right Way Camp and a former college teammate of Josh Cameron.

Ali Walker

Ali Walker is Danny's mother, an English teacher who is also known as a "cool mom."



Objects/Places

Middletown

Middletown is the small town on Long Island, New York where Danny and his friends live.

McFeeley Park

McFeeley Park is the community park where Danny and his friends play basketball, and where Tess plays tennis.

Right Way

Right Way is an elite basketball camp in Cedarville, Maine where Danny, Will and Ty spend their summer.

Cedarville

Cedarville is a small town in Maine where Right Way Camp is located, and also where Tess's uncle has a home.

The House

The House is an arena on the grounds of Right Way Camp and the largest of the camp's basketball courts where the most important games are played.

Indoor-Outdoor Ball

An indoor-outdoor ball is a basketball that can be used on an indoor wood floor or an outdoor concrete surface without damaging it.

Gampel

Gampel is the bunkhouse where Danny and Zach live during basketball camp. It is named after Gampel Pavilion, home of the University of Connecticut basketball team.



Coffee Lake

Right Way Camp is built on the shore of Coffee Lake. Tess's uncle also has a home on the other side of the lake where she visits him during the summer.

Canoe

A canoe is a small boat that Danny and his friends use to get across the lake to visit Tess.

Tess's Camera

Tess's camera is her most prized possession. It becomes important to the story when Lamar smashes it in an effort to get back at Danny.

Travel Team

A travel team is a team made up of excellent players, usually chosen by invitation and/or try-outs. Rather than playing in a community or school league, a travel team plays similar teams from other towns in the region and sometimes across the country.



Themes

Coming of Age

Coming of age is a common theme in novels written for and/or about young people. In a coming-of-age story, a young boy or girl grows and matures over the course of the plot, which can take place over a period of several years or be compressed into a much shorter time frame if the main character learns and internalizes a number of life lessons over that period.

In *Summer Ball*, the main character, 13-year-old Danny Walker, is at something of a crossroads in his young life. His exceptional basketball skills and strong work ethic have always made up for his short height, but as other boys his age are getting taller and he is not, he is afraid that he'll be passed up in the one sport that is the center of his life and that of his friends. He realizes that although he is an exceptional player, he has also had the advantage of being coached by his father, who has given him opportunities that other coaches might not.

When he arrives at Right Way Camp, Danny has to face, for the first time, a coach who simply doesn't like him and doesn't give him the opportunity to show his skills. Because of his frustration, when he does have the chance to play, he usually makes mistakes that reinforce the coach's opinion that he isn't as good as his reputation. He also is challenged by meeting a fellow camper who is not only a rival on the court, but who takes a personal dislike to him and taunts him at every opportunity, and his immature, petty attitude has possibly cost him the friendship of the girl he likes.

Danny faces a personal crisis when his coach tells him outright that he is too short for basketball and should try soccer instead, and for the first time in his life, he decides to quit and to do so in a sneaky way that will force him to lie. However, Tess's influence and the guilt he feels cause him to grow up emotionally and face the difficult parts of camp, including his problems with his coach. He also learns that people are not always what they appear to be when he becomes friends with Rasheed, his former rival, who has more in common with Danny than either would have imagined, and he learns that there are right and wrong ways to handle a bully. Danny's maturity is furthered by his decision to put his own problems aside and help young Zach Fox, who is struggling with many of the same problems Danny is.

Overcoming Adversity

Like many novels, overcoming adversity is a major theme of *Summer Ball*. The main character, in this case Danny Walker, is faced with a number of distressing problems and he must learn to resolve them in the most appropriate way so the story can end happily.



When the book opens, Danny's main problem is his worry over his height and the fact that he might not be able to compete effectively against the taller players he is certain to encounter at Right Way Camp. It does not appear that Danny has been faced with many problems that he's had to resolve on his own before. His main disappointment up to this point has been getting cut from his first travel basketball team, but his father resolved the issue by forming a new and better team with Danny as its star. At camp, he's away from his parents for the first time and has to rely on their upbringing and his own good judgement to face his problems.

Danny's first challenge is the housing mix-up that puts him in a bunkhouse for younger kids. While he first assumes this will be a temporary issue, he rises to the occasion and decides to stay at Gampel in order to help Zach Fox, in whom he sees a younger version of himself. However, that glitch is minor compared to the real issues he soon faces when his coach chooses him as the player he'll pick on most, one of his teammates turns out to be an old rival, he disappoints and alienates his father, he gets into an antagonistic relationship with the camp bully, and his own actions threaten to drive away his close friend Tess.

As the weeks go on, Danny faces each of his challenges and finds a way to conquer them. While he initially decides to run away from his problems by quitting camp, he eventually decides to stick it out and in the end, he gets almost everything he wants with the exception of the coach's admission that he was wrong about Danny.

Sports as a Metaphor for Life

Summer Ball appeals to young readers, especially those who love sports, by using sports as a metaphor for life. The theme is woven throughout the book by the observations of the Danny Walker and his friends, the lessons Danny's father tries to teach him through basketball, and events in the plot itself.

The theme is found from the book's first page as Danny's father reminds him that he was able to become a pro basketball player despite being less than 5'10" tall. Throughout the rest of the book, both in actual scenes between Danny and Richie and in Danny's memories of previous conversations with his father, Richie imparts life lessons in the form of advice for playing basketball and comparisons between basketball and other life challenges. He tells Danny that he has to keep taking his game to the next level or he'll never leave the one he's at, and that he should prove himself rather than complain and make the most of his opportunities. Over and over, he admonishes Danny to face his challenges, whether they come in the form of an opposing player or the coach who dislikes him, and prove himself rather than backing down or quitting. Even Danny's friends Will and Ty quote Richie's "basketballisms" throughout the book, so even when he is in another state, Richie and his lessons are a constant presence.

All of the events that take place in the book directly involve basketball, but all of them also teach a lesson about life. Through basketball, Danny (and in some cases, the other

characters as well) learns how to effectively deal with bullies, look out for someone younger and weaker, handle situations that are unfair, overcome personal weaknesses and failings, and learn to live with what you can't change.

Style

Point of View

The novel is told through a third-person narrator who sees things from the perspective of the main character, Danny Walker. The reader always knows what Danny is thinking and feeling, and glimpses into his thoughts and feelings on previous occasions are offered frequently, but the other characters are seen only through Danny's eyes. For example, in Danny's first conversation with Tess in Chapter 3, the author lets the reader know how Danny feels about hurting Tess's feelings and making her cry, but doesn't provide a glimpse into the mind of Tess herself. The story is told in the present tense with the exception of a few flashbacks.

The book includes a balance of exposition and dialogue, with much important information revealed through conversations between Danny and other characters. Examples include the chapter in which Coach Powers suggests that Danny switch to soccer and the one in which Danny and Rasheed finally get to know each other off the basketball court. We are not privy to the thoughts of Coach Powers or Rasheed, but learn about them only through their actual words, Danny's thoughts, and objective descriptions.

Setting

The book is set primarily at Right Way Basketball Camp in Cedarville, Maine. Right Way is an elite camp for top players from 11 years old through high school, and is a place where college scouts often show up to look at prospective players. It is located in a rural area on the banks of Coffee Lake and is a short drive from Portland. The camp includes a large number of indoor and basketball courts, including The House, its largest arena in which one wall opens onto the lake and where the camp's most important games are played. Campers live in a series of bunkhouses named after college and NBA arenas. The houses for the younger players carry the names of college arenas, such as Gampel Pavilion, home of the University of Connecticut Huskies and the building in which Danny and Zach live, and Boston Garden, home of the Boston Celtics and the bunkhouse to which Will, Ty and Tarik are assigned. Most of the book's action takes place on the camp's various basketball courts, in Gampel, and elsewhere on the camp grounds.

Coffee Lake becomes an important setting when Danny, Ty, Will and Zach take a canoe across the lake to visit Tess at her uncle's house. The town of Cedarville is also used on a few occasions when the players have an opportunity to go into town.

The book opens in Middletown, a small town on Long Island where Danny and his friends live. The reader is also introduced to McFeeley Park where the boys play basketball and hang out. Although all except the first couple of chapters take place outside of Middletown, the town and McFeeley Park remain important settings because



they are referred to frequently throughout the story since they have been such an important part of Danny's life and that of his friends.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is straightforward, descriptive, and appropriate for a young reader. The book is filled with basketball lingo, so it is designed to appeal primarily to readers who know a great deal about the game. Many sections provide detailed play-by-play descriptions of game situations, which can be confusing and tedious for readers who are not particularly knowledgeable about the game. The author also includes a fair amount of urban dialogue in conversations involving Tarik, Rasheed, Lamar and other black players, and some of the book's humor comes from Will's fascination with the expressions he learns from Rasheed and Tarik. The author also uses subtle physical descriptions to indicate that Tarik and Rasheed are black rather than stating the fact outright.

The book consists of 26 chapters, most of which are quite short. The longer chapters come at the beginning and provide the backdrop for the story and a great deal of background about Danny, his relationships with his friends and family, his basketball career, and his feelings about his upcoming trip to Right Way. Many chapters end with an ominous-sounding tease designed to preview what is coming up and entice the reader to continue on to the next chapter.

Structure

Description



Quotes

"Danny would never tell it to him this way, but the coolest thing about Will Stoddard wasn't the way he made him laugh. It was that Danny already knew he had the best friend he was ever going to have in his life."

Chapter 2, page 15

"Because I don't quit. And you're just like me."

Danny to Zach

Chapter 6, page 62

"You know what this really is? It's Ty's dad cutting you all over again. Another grown-up telling you you're not good enough. I thought you always used to tell me that the championship you guys really won in travel was the championship of any kid who got told by an adult that they weren't good enough?"

Tess to Danny

Chapter 14, page 137

"A ball in his hands had always made him feel smarter, even smart enough to keep up with Tess. A ball in Danny's hands had always made him feel that he could figure anything out, like it was just a simple basketball problem, finding the smartest way to get the ball from here to there and then through the hoop."

Chapter 14, page 138

"This one's for the championship of you, big guy."

Tess to Danny

Chapter 14, page 139

"Then he jogged to catch up with Will and Tarik, wondering if those few minutes with Rasheed, before the air ball, was as good as it was going to get for him at the Right Way basketball camp."

Chapter 17, page 156

"Being friends with somebody can seem like the hardest thing going, Danny thought, until it feels like the easiest thing in the world."

Chapter 20, page 179

"He'd promised himself he was going to stick it out. Get something out of these three weeks. It was like when you set your mind on getting a good grade in a class you stunk at, or just plain hated. He was going to do it, no matter what. A promise was a promise, even if it was one you made to yourself."

Chapter 20, page 180

"He's a bully,' was the best Danny could do. 'Bullies do stuff like this because they can. They do it even if they're as good at something as Lamar is at basketball. Heck, you see it all the time in pro sports.'"



Danny to Tess
Chapter 21, page 193

"'Nope,' he said, 'you're right about that. Maybe most right about Rasheed, even if he's the one of us you know the least. He told me that people can't get past his looks, and maybe I couldn't either, at least at the start. But it turns out he's more old school than I am.'"

Danny to Tess
Chapter 21, page 193

"Maybe it was a coincidence, maybe not, but their last two games, Danny had played as much with the first unit as Cole had. Sometimes more. A week ago, he couldn't wait to get out of here. Now he couldn't wait for the play-offs to start."
Chapter 23, page 207

"Sometimes you didn't get to pick your fights. Sometimes, Danny thought, they picked you."
Chapter 23, page 209

"It was amazing how many times he quoted his dad. Even now, when his dad wasn't speaking to him."
Chapter 24, page 221

"Danny wanted to say something, call out to him. But there was nothing left to say. Nothing he could say at this point that was going to change anything between them."
Chapter 24, page 223

"There was something in his eyes now Danny hadn't seen before, a light in them, some kind of spark."
Chapter 25, page 227

"He's right, Danny thought. He hated to admit it, especially about a guy he'd hated from the first day. But Coach Powers was right. For the first time, Danny at least could see why he might have been a great coach in the first place."
Chapter 25, page 228

"'I could play soccer if I wanted,' Danny said. 'But I'm a basketball player.'"
Chapter 26, page 244



Topics for Discussion

Compare and contrast the characters of Will and Tarik. Include their physical appearance as well as their personalities. What characteristics cause them to become friends so quickly?

Discuss the importance of Nick Pinto to the novel. Does Danny relate to him? Why or why not? How does he influence Danny? Does he have an impact on the plot?

In the beginning of the book, the reader learns that Danny's parents have recently reconciled after a long separation and the topic comes up several times as the plot moves forward. In what circumstances does he continue to think about it? How does it affect his behavior?

Discuss Coach Ed Powers. Why does he single out Danny as his favorite kid to pick on? What makes him a good coach? What makes him a poor coach? Do you think the outcome of the championship is satisfying to him? Why or why not?

Discuss Danny's relationship with his father. In what ways is his father a good role model and a positive influence on Danny? Do you think he is right or wrong in his treatment of Danny after he learns about the faked injury? How does his history with Coach Powers affect Danny?

Some of the kids at Right Way camp are white and some are black. Do you think the book perpetuates racial stereotypes or diminishes them? Provide at least three examples to back up your answer.

Compare and contrast Danny's friendship with Will and his friendship with Rasheed. Is one a better friend than the other? Does one understand Danny better than the other? If so, in what ways?

Compare and contrast Rasheed and Lamar. Include their physical appearance, backgrounds, families, values and attitudes. Try to think of real-life examples from the world of sports or entertainment that would be comparable to each boy. In what ways are Danny's background and values more similar to Rasheed's than Lamar's are?