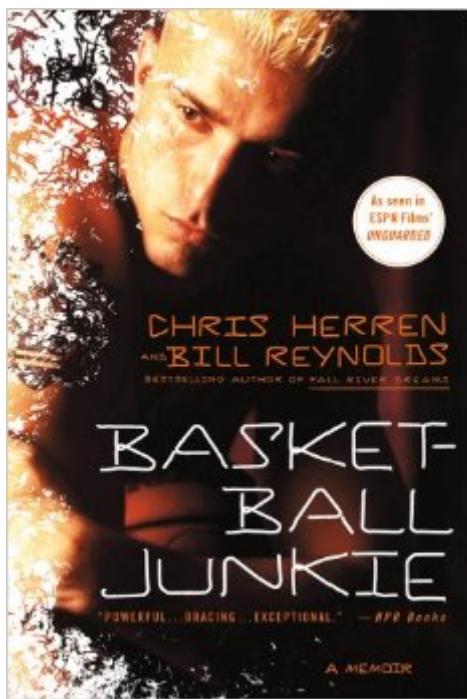


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Basketball Junkie: A Memoir



Synopsis

I was dead for thirty seconds. That's what the cop in Fall River told me. When the EMTs found me, there was a needle in my arm and a packet of heroin in the front seat. At basketball-crazy Durfee High School in Fall River, Massachusetts, junior guard Chris Herren carried his family's and the city's dreams on his skinny frame. His grandfather, father, and older brother had created their own sports legends in a declining city; he was the last, best hope for a career beyond the shuttered mills and factories. Herren was heavily recruited by major universities, chosen as a McDonald's All-American, featured in a Sports Illustrated cover story, and at just seventeen years old became the central figure in Fall River Dreams, an acclaimed book about the 1994 Durfee team's quest for the state championship. Leaving Fall River for college, Herren starred on Jerry Tarkanian's Fresno State Bulldogs team of talented misfits, which included future NBA players as well as future convicted felons. His gritty, tattooed, hip-hop persona drew the ire of rival fans and more national attention: Rolling Stone profiled him, 60 Minutes interviewed him, and the Denver Nuggets drafted him. When the Boston Celtics acquired his contract, he lived the dream of every Massachusetts kidâ •but off the court Herren was secretly crumbling, as his alcohol and drug use escalated and his life spiraled out of control. Twenty years later, Chris Herren was married to his high-school sweetheart, the father of three young children, and a heroin junkie. His basketball career was over, consumed by addictions; he had no job, no skills, and was a sadly familiar figure to those in Fall River who remembered him as a boy, now prowling the streets he once ruled, looking for a fix. One day, for a time he cannot remember, he would die. In his own words, Chris Herren tells how he nearly lost everything and everyone he loved, and how he found a way back to life. Powerful, honest, and dramatic, Basketball Junkie is a remarkable memoir, harrowing in its descent, and heartening in its return.

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Customer Reviews

For some reason I've been reading quite a few memoirs lately about people who crash and burn due to addiction and then make it back out of the cesspool. There is a potential hazard with serial reading like this, as there is a risk of all of these stories starting to jumble together. However, I needn't have worried in this case, as Chris Herren presents a searing and brutally honest telling of his epic downfall from NBA player to junkie. This memoir follows Herren from his well-documented time as a high school basketball star to his college and professional playing days in the NBA as well as overseas. This provides a glimpse into what the life of a college and professional athlete can be like underneath all of the perks. Although Herren never lets himself off the hook for his misdeeds, at times he does seem to be an apologist for others such as Jerry Tarkanian, who depending on your point of view is either Sports' Spawn of Satan or a man who believed in second chances. In this book more than any other similar tome that I've read recently, I got the sense that this was a story that Herren absolutely had to tell, though he is so incredibly upfront about his various misdeeds that I almost suspect he may be punishing himself for his past transgressions. It has a feel of atonement. He makes no excuses; he blames no one other than himself. I admire that. And while I was concerned at first that this might be another case of an athlete staying sober for a month and calling it a recovery, by the end of the story it seems clear to me that after two years in recovery, Herren has all the tools in place to make it. The overall message of this book is not just "hey kids, don't do drugs".

Bill Reynolds' "Fall River Dreams" made Chris Herren a national celebrity when he was just sixteen; but this was just one more pressure on an impressionable youth. Already a teen delinquent in a no-hope town, where only the basketball team bound the community, even the adults pinned their aspirations of Herren's college and NBA careers. But the pressure, frustration, and despair manifested in the form of several abusive, self-destructive addictions. Seventeen years after Herren reached stardom, this memoir recounts how his demons became the center of his life. He achieved the heights of stardom, playing under Jerry Tarkanian before the NBA draft. His paychecks soared so high that he lost more in one card game than I make per year. But everything paled for Herren beside his hunger for the next fix. Piece by piece, he lost everything that mattered. Herren's brutal

honesty regarding his long string of bad choices recreates his horrific experience. As he repeatedly makes bad bets and pins his hopes on false promises, we feel life's weight mounting as relentlessly as Herren must have. And when he finally hits rock bottom, sees everything he still stands to lose, and chooses to pull his life back together, we feel the same weight lifted off our own shoulders. Unfortunately, we can see Herren's lack of experience in writing. Reynolds' prologue says that Herren seldom read in high school, and this book suggests he hasn't remedied that much since. For instance, consider the really short paragraphs. They accumulate. The f***ing language gets distracting. He makes "you" the center of many of his anecdotes, like he's deflecting. And all his rhetorical questions? Don't even get me started.

I had never heard of Chris Herren before this book. Being a major basketball fan of both the NBA and Collegiate Hoops I was intrigued by the book after listening to Herren give an interview on Dan Patrick's radio show. The book didn't disappoint as Herren and Reynolds are excellent storytellers. Herren emerged as the local star after replacing his brother as the family standout. He gained national attention from major college programs while becoming a superstar in high school and on AAU squads competing at the national level. During all of this success he was doing drugs, drinking, failing classes and disrespecting any adult in his life including his parents and his coaches. This leads to the downward spiral he would exist in for the remainder of his basketball career. I don't want to go into too much detail as the book is worth reading for yourself, but I was amazed at how much his teams, coaches and schools would put up with just because he was a star athlete. I was also amazed at the fact that he could play and function on the basketball court while being high or drunk. I couldn't relate to that side of his story but I did relate with his reflections on the basketball side of things. His description of his hatred for losing and how his body would be tormented in any way possible in order to avoid the feeling of losing was something I too went through in high school. In fact, my body is a mess now and I regret living that way. He described how his teammates tolerated him but probably didn't really like playing with him in high school, and I am certain that was probably the feeling that my teammates had towards me. This book isn't uplifting or encouraging by any means.

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